WIDOWERS' HOUSES, BY G. BERNARD SHAW. BEING NUMBER ONE OF THE INDEPENDENT THEATRE SERIES OF PLAYS. EDITED BY J. T. GREIN.

LONDON: HENRY AND CO.
BOUVERIE STREET, E.C. 1893

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WIDOWERS' HOUSES

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WIDOWERS' HOUSES. A COMEDY BY G. BERNARD SHAW. FIRST ACTED AT THE INDEPENDENT THEATRE IN LONDON.

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The Editor's Preface

to the

Independent Theatre Series.

THE works produced by the Independent Theatre are not merely plays to be seen: they are plays to be read. They belong to Literature as well as to Drama; and I should consider the work of the Independent Theatre only half done if it did not succeed in making its repertory known throughout the country to those who are out of reach of its performances. Besides, looking forward as I do to the establishment of Independent Theatres in every centre of population in the kingdom, I am anxious that the work done in London should be judged in the provinces at first hand from the author's own words, and not solely by the hasty reports contained in the London letter of the local newspaper. Hence this Series, in which, if the public takes kindly to it, will be published all the more important plays produced by the Independent Theatre.

I have selected my friend Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* to inaugurate the Series, because it was the first original English work the Independent Theatre

brought to light, and because it is in some respects the most remarkable play in the Independent repertory, a fact proved by the extent to which it has set the machinery of public opinion in motion and supplied bricks and mortar for the consolidation of our Theatre.

After the performance of *Widowers' Houses* many correspondents inundated me with questions. Why —why, indeed !—should I produce a play which in fact was not a play at all, which was a socialist pamphlet in three-act form, which seemed impracticable from a theatrical point of view, and had no other merits but its dialogue and the portrayal of one or two characters ? The time has now come to say, in reply to these unanswered queries, that I have nothing to do with the tendency, the form, the practicability (a very elastic sort of term) of any play that is offered to me. I ask merely, Is it artistic, is it literary, is it interesting, does it reveal promise ? And in the case of *Widowers' Houses* I unhesitatingly say Yes ! in every instance.

But there is another question which weighs heavily with me.

I contend that it is one part of the mission of the Independent Theatre to attract to the stage all those who, having made a distinct mark in the literary world, are keeping aloof from the boards of the playhouse for want of encouragement, for want of stimulation, for want of opportunity.

The work of such men is certain to be of some value; and even if in their firstlings the faults should overwhelm the qualities, I hold that one renders a service both to them and to our drama by producing

them. For through the performance, and through the performance *only*, they will see their work under a microscope, as it were ; they will see its strong points ; they will be forced to admit its weak ones ; they will be able to judge whether they possess the gifts that make playwrights.

Bernard Shaw is one of the men who deserve to be called to the boards ; and I trust that the result will prompt him to persevere after his first fairly successful effort.

I can only wish, in conclusion, that in the course of time the Independent Theatre may earn the fame of having so materially strengthened the ranks of native dramatists, that the *Independent Theatre Series* will become a household word.

J. T. GREIN.

London, *Ides of March* 1893.

The Author's Preface.

THE early history of the play which forms this first volume of the "Independent Theatre Series" has been given by Mr. William Archer in *The World* of the 14th December, 1892, in the following terms :—

"Partly to facilitate the labours of Mr. George Bernard Shaw's biographers, and partly by way of relieving my own conscience, I think I ought to give a short history of the genesis of *Widowers' Houses*. Far away back in the olden days [1885], while as yet the Independent Theatre slumbered in the womb of Time, together with the New Drama, the New Criticism, the New Humour, and all the other glories of our renovated world, I used to be a daily frequenter of the British Museum Reading Room. Even more assiduous in his attendance was a young man of tawny complexion and attire, beside whom I used frequently to find myself seated. My curiosity was piqued by the odd conjunction of his subjects of research. Day after day for weeks he had before him two books, which he studied alternately, if not simultaneously—Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (in

French), and an orchestral score of *Tristan und Isolde*. I did not know then how exactly this quaint juxtaposition symbolised the main interests of his life. Presently I met him at the house of a common acquaintance, and we conversed for the first time. I learned from himself that he was the author of several unpublished masterpieces of fiction. Construction, he owned with engaging modesty, was not his strong point, but his dialogue was incomparable. Now, in those days, I had still a certain hankering after the rewards, if not the glories, of the playwright. With a modesty in no way inferior to Mr. Shaw's, I had realised that I could not write dialogue a bit; but I still considered myself a born constructor. So I proposed, and Mr. Shaw agreed to, a collaboration. I was to provide him with one of the numerous plots I kept in stock, and he was to write the dialogue. So said, so done. I drew out, scene by scene, the scheme of a twaddling cup-and-saucer comedy vaguely suggested by Augier's *Ceinture Dorée*. The details I forget, but I know it was to be called *Rhinegold*, was to open, as *Widowers' Houses* actually does, in a hotel-garden on the Rhine, and was to have two heroines, a sentimental and a comic one, according to the accepted Robertson-Byron-Carton formula. I fancy the hero was to propose to the sentimental heroine, believing her to be the poor niece instead of the rich daughter of the sweater, or slum-landlord, or whatever he may have been; and I know he was to carry on in the most heroic fashion, and was ultimately to succeed in throwing the tainted treasure of his father-in-law, metaphorically speaking, into the Rhine. All

this I gravely propounded to Mr. Shaw, who listened with no less admirable gravity. Then I thought the matter had dropped, for I heard no more of it for many weeks. I used to see Mr. Shaw at the Museum, laboriously writing page after page of the most exquisitely neat shorthand at the rate of about three words a minute; but it did not occur to me that this was our play. After about six weeks he said to me, 'Look here, I've written half the first act of that comedy, and I've used up all your plot. Now I want some more to go on with.' I told him that my plot was a rounded and perfect organic whole, and that I could no more eke it out in this fashion than I could provide him or myself with a set of supplementary arms and legs. I begged him to extend his shorthand and let me see what he had done; but this would have taken him far too long. He tried to decipher some of it orally, but the process was too lingering and painful for endurance. So he simply gave me an outline in narrative of what he had done; and I saw that, so far from having used up my plot, he had not even touched it. There the matter rested for months and years. Mr. Shaw would now and then hold out vague threats of finishing 'our play,' but I felt no serious alarm. I thought (judging from my own experience in other cases) that when he came to read over in cold blood what he had written, he would see what impossible stuff it was. Perhaps my free utterance of this view piqued him; perhaps he felt impelled to remove from the Independent Theatre the reproach of dealing solely in foreign products. The fire of his genius, at all events, was not to be quenched by

my persistent applications of the wet-blanket. He finished his play; Mr. Grein, as in duty bound, accepted it; and the result was the performance of Friday last [9th Dec. 1892] at the Independent Theatre."

To this history I have little to add. The circumstances occurred, in the main, as Mr. Archer states them. But I most strenuously deny that there is any such great difference between his *Rhinegold* and *Widowers' Houses* as he supposes. I appeal to the impartial public, which has now both my play and Mr. Archer's story before it, to judge whether I did not deal faithfully with him. The Rhine hotel garden, the hero proposing to the heroine in ignorance of the source of her father's wealth, the "tainted treasure of the father-in-law," the renunciation of it by the lover: all these will be found as prominently in the following pages as in Mr. Archer's description of the fable which he persists in saying I did "not even touch." As a matter of fact the dissolution of partnership between us came when I told him that I had finished up the renunciation and wanted some more story to go on with, as I was only in the middle of the second act. He said that according to his calculation the renunciation ought to have landed me at the end of the play. I could only reply that his calculation did not work out, and that he must supply further material. This he most unreasonably refused to do; and I had eventually to fish up the tainted treasure out of the Rhine, so to speak, and make it last out another act and a half, which I had to invent all by myself. Clearly, then, he was the defaulter; and I am the victim.

It will have been noted by the attentive reader that what I have called a story, Mr. Archer calls a plot; and that he mentions two heroines, introduced for the sole purpose of being mistaken for one another. Now, I confess to discarding the second daughter. She was admittedly a mere joist in the plot; and I had then, have now, and have always had, an utter contempt for "constructed" works of art. How any man in his senses can deliberately take as his model the sterile artifice of Wilkie Collins or Scribe, and repudiate the natural artistic activity of Fielding, Goldsmith, Defoe and Dickens, not to mention Æschylus and Shakespear, is beyond argument with me: those who entertain such preferences are obviously incapable people, who prefer a "well made play" to *King Lear* exactly as they prefer acrostics to sonnets. As a fictionist, my natural way is to imagine characters and spin out a story about them, whether I am writing a novel or a play; and I please myself by reflecting that this has been the way of all great masters of fiction. At the same time I am quite aware that a writer with the necessary constructive ingenuity, and the itch for exercising it for its own sake, can entertain audiences or readers very agreeably by carefully constructing and unravelling mysteries and misunderstandings; and that this ingenuity may be associated with sufficient creative imagination to give a considerable show of humanity and some interest of character to the puppets contrived for the purpose of furthering the plot. The line between the authors who place their imagination at the service of their ingenuity and those who place their ingenuity at the service of their imagination may be hard to

draw with precise justice (to Edgar Allan Poe, for instance !) ; but it is clear that if we draw it as an equator, Scribe and the plot constructors will be at the south pole, and Æschylus and the dramatic poets at the north. Now, Archer's *Rhinegold,* in the absence of any convincing evidence that I was an Æschylus, was designed for the southern hemisphere ; and *Widowers' Houses* was built for the north. I told the story, but discarded the plot; and Archer at once perceived that this step made the enterprise entirely my own, since the resultant play, whether good or bad, must on my method be a *growth* out of the stimulated imagination of the actual writer, and not a manufactured article constructed by an artisan according to plans and specifications supplied by an inventor. The collaboration was therefore dropped ; and after finishing the second act, so as to avoid leaving a loose end, and noting such beginnings of the third as had already sprouted, I left the work aside for seven years and thought no more of it. Last August, having been rather overworked by the occurrence of a General Election at the busiest part of the journalistic season in London, I could do nothing for a while but potter aimlessly over my old papers, among which I came across the manuscript of the play; and it so tickled me that I there and then sat down and finished it. But for Mr. Grein and the Independent Theatre Society it would probably have gone back to its drawer and lain there for another seven years, if not for ever.

Some idea of the discussion which followed the performance may be gathered from the appendices

which will be found at the end of this volume. The entire novelty on the stage of the standpoint taken, which is impartially Socialistic, greatly confused the critics, especially those who are in the habit of accepting as Socialism that spirit of sympathy with the poor and indignant protest against suffering and injustice which, in modern literature, culminated in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, and has lately been forced into the theatre by the pressure of the Socialist propaganda outside. This "stage Socialism" is represented in my play by the good-natured compunction of my hero, who conceives the horrors of the slums as merely the result of atrocious individual delinquency on the part of the slum landlord. In spite of the unanswerable way in which the shallowness and impracticability of this view are exposed at once by a single speech from a practical business man, many of my critics were unable to rid themselves of it. They dismissed the man of business as a sophistical villain, and so got hopelessly astray as to the characterization in the piece. My portraiture of Lickcheese, the slum rent collector, an effective but quite common piece of work, pleased better than any of the rest. My technical skill as a playwright sustained many attacks, all based on the assumption that the only admissible stage technique is the technique of plot construction, an assumption which excludes Shakespear and Goethe from the ranks of competent stage workmen, and which therefore appears to me to reduce itself to absurdity, although I am well aware that many of our critics look on Shakespear and Goethe as literary men who were unfortunately disabled from producing good acting

plays by their deficiency in the stage craft of the ordinary farcical comedy writer and melodramatist. It was further objected that my play, being didactic, was therefore not a work of art—a proposition which, if examined, will be found to mean either that the world's acknowledged masterpieces are not works of art, or else exactly nothing at all. Now, I submit that I could not reasonably be expected to defer to the authority of canons of art which no artist acknowledges, and in subjection to which no art would be possible, even if I had not, by my practice in the profession of music critic during the remarkable development effected both in that art and in its criticism by Richard Wagner, been sufficiently trained in critical processes to recognize the objections I have cited as nothing more than the common fallacies and ineptitudes into which all critics fall when first confronted with a progressive movement. I have also practised picture criticism, and have had to make up my mind as to the pre-Raphaelite movement and the Impressionist movement, with the result that I have come to suspect dramatic critics of never having had to make up their minds about anything, owing to the fact that until the advent of Ibsen the other day there had not for many years been anything worth calling a movement in dramatic art. I by no means undervalued their like or dislike of my work, which was written as much to please them as any one else ; but, as an expert, I found their critical analysis anything but skilful, and their power of imposing on themselves by phrase-making, boundless. Even the best of the younger school will occasionally be satisfied that he has quite accounted for an unex-

pected speech by dismissing it as a wanton paradox (without any consciousness of having insulted the author); or he will dispose of an incident by pointing out that it is "inconsistent"; or, if he wishes to be specially ingenious, he will say of a character—a red-haired one, for instance—that it is not a human being at all, but a type of the red-haired variety of mankind. I make free to criticize my critics thus because some of them are my personal friends; others have dealt so handsomely by me that I cannot very well except them without a ridiculous appearance of returning the compliment; and the rest will be all the better for being brought to book. Besides, I may offer my *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, written and published before there was any question of finishing or producing *Widowers' Houses*, as a substantial proof that my interest in the art of criticism is not at bottom merely the protest of my own sensitiveness against the very disrespectful way in which my work has been handled in various quarters. There must, however, be no mistake as to the ground upon which I challenge criticism for the play, now that I submit it in print to the public. It is a propagandist play—a didactic play—a play with a purpose; but I do not therefore claim any special indulgence for it from people who go to the theatre to be entertained. I offer it as a technically good practicable stage play, one which will, if adequately acted, hold its proper audience and drive its story home to the last word.

But in claiming place for my play among works of art, I must make a melancholy reservation. One or two friendly readers may find it interesting,

amusing, even admirable, as far as a mere topical farce can excite admiration; but nobody will find it a beautiful or lovable work. It is saturated with the vulgarity of the life it represents: the people do not speak nobly, live gracefully, or sincerely face their own position: the author is not giving expression in pleasant fancies to the underlying beauty and romance of happy life, but dragging up to the smooth surface of "respectability" a handful of the slime and foulness of its polluted bed, and playing off your laughter at the scandal of the exposure against your shudder at its blackness. I offer it as my own criticism of the author of *Widowers' Houses* that the disillusion which makes all great dramatic poets tragic has here made him only derisive; and derision is by common consent a baser atmosphere than that of tragedy. I had better have written a beautiful play, like *Twelfth Night*, or a grand play, like the tragic masterpieces; but, frankly, I was not able to: modern commercialism is a bad art school, and cannot, with all its robberies, murders and prostitutions, move us in the grand manner to pity and terror: it is squalid, futile, blundering, mean, ridiculous, for ever uneasily pretending to be the wide-minded, humane, enterprising thing it is not. It is not my fault, reader, that my art is the expression of my sense of moral and intellectual perversity rather than of my sense of beauty. My life has been passed mostly in big modern towns, where my sense of beauty has been starved whilst my intellect has been gorged with problems like that of the slums in this play, until at last I have come, in a horrible sort of way, to relish them enough to make them the

subjects of my essays as an artist. Such art as can come out of these conditions for a man of my endowment I claim to have put into my work; and therefore you will please judge it, not as a pamphlet in dialogue, but as in intention a work of art as much as any comedy of Molière's is a work of art, and as pretending to be a better made play for actual use and long wear on the boards than anything that has yet been turned out by the patent constructive machinery. And I claim that its value in both respects is enhanced by the fact that it deals with a burning social question, and is deliberately intended to induce people to vote on the Progressive side at the next County Council election in London. So, as the clown says in *All's Well*, "Spare not me." I am no novice in the current critical theories of dramatic art; and what I have done I have done on purpose.

London, *March* 1893.

ROYALTY THEATRE,

DEAN STREET, SOHO.

THE INDEPENDENT THEATRE.

FOUNDER AND SOLE DIRECTOR, J. T. GREIN.

SECOND SEASON, SIXTH PERFORMANCE.

FRIDAY, 9th December, 1892,

WIDOWERS' HOUSES,

AN ORIGINAL DIDACTIC REALISTIC PLAY IN THREE ACTS, BY

G. BERNARD SHAW.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Harry Trench	Mr. W. J. ROBERTSON.
Cokane	Mr. ARTHUR WHITTAKER.
Sartorius	Mr. T. W. PERCYVAL.
Lickcheese	Mr. JAMES WELCH.
Waiter	Mr. E. P. DONNE.
Porter	Mr. W. ALISON.
Annie	Miss N. DE SILVA.
Blanche	Miss FLORENCE FARR.

The Play produced under the direction of
Mr. H. DE LANGE.

Dramatis Personæ.

HARRY TRENCH, a newly qualified physician. Age about 24, dark, stoutly built, thick neck, close-cropped black hair, undignified medical-student manners, frank, hasty, rather boyish.

COKANE, any age from 35 to 50, reduced gentleman with good shop-walker's manners, fidgety, touchy, scanty hair, constitutionally ridiculous.

SARTORIUS, 50, well preserved, upright carriage, imposing domineering style, incisive utterance, high forehead, aquiline nose, resolute mouth, clean shaven, evidences of money about him, in first Act wears light grey frock coat with silk linings, white hat, field-glass slung in new leather case, &c.

LICKCHEESE, shabby slum rent collector, dirty face and linen, scrubby beard and whiskers, going bald. In the third act he is brilliantly clean, shaved except for wax-ended imperial moustache, is much fatter, wears expensive fur overcoat, &c.

BLANCHE SARTORIUS, well dressed, good-looking, strong-minded young woman, presentably lady-like, not too delicate or refined. Fresh and attractive, but her father's daughter.

Also ANNIE, a parlourmaid; *an* ENGLISH WAITER AT A GERMAN HOTEL; *and a* PORTER.

Act I. In the grounds of a Hotel-Restaurant at Remagen on the Rhine.

Acts II. and III. In Sartorius's house at Surbiton.

Interval of four months supposed to elapse between Acts II. and III.

Widowers' Houses.

Act I.

Garden of a Hotel at Remagen on the Rhine, on a fine afternoon in August. Tables and chairs under the trees. Entrance to garden from riverside, L. *Entrance to hotel,* R. *Entrance to Table d'Hôte,* R C. *Waiter in attendance.*

SCENE I.

COKANE, TRENCH.

Enter from hotel Trench and Cokane, in tourist dress.

Cokane.

(*on the threshold, speaking to the waiter*) Two beers for us out here. (*Exit Waiter into hotel. Cokane comes down to Trench*) We have got the room with the best view in the hotel, Harry, thanks to my tact—thanks to my tact. We'll leave in the morning and do Mainz and Frankfurt. Frankfurt wont take us long—nothing there but pictures. Next day, Nuremberg!—finest collection of instruments of torture in the world.

Trench.

All right. Let's sit down here under the trees and look out the trains (*produces Railway Guide—Continental Bradshaw or Hendschel's Telegraph—and is about to sit at the* L *table*).

Cokane.

No, not under the trees, dear boy: there is a frightful draught coming in between them. Let us get the shelter of the building. (*Goes to* R *table.*) You will find this the most comfortable chair. Pah! the seat is all dusty. These foreigners are deplorably unclean in their habits. I shall complain of this. Kellner! Kellner!!

Trench.

Never mind: it dont matter, old chappie. Let's sit here. (*Goes to centre table and sits.*)

Cokane.

Certainly, my dear fellow, if you wish. But dont you think this table has a northerly aspect? Is it safe to expose ourselves——

Trench.

My dear Cokane, I can assure you, as a medical man of three weeks' standing, that you will not get rheumatism from the sun here at five o'clock on an August afternoon. Come along: dont be an ass. (*Pulls Cokane into the chair beside him. Cokane is offended. He sits down under protest; buttons his coat; and coughs slightly. Trench loses his temper.*) I will go inside if you like—if you persist in making a fool of yourself. Exposed! What are you exposed to?

Cokane.

We are exposed to the gaze of the people with

whom we have been travelling. The *canaille* I do not mind; but nearly all the people who came on board the steamer at Coblentz are English; and I do not wish for your sake—for *your* sake, Harry—to be seen by them until I have at least put on a tall hat. Look at our appearance.

Trench.

What is the matter with our appearance?

Cokane.

Negligé, my dear fellow: *negligé*. On the steamboat a little *negligé* was quite *en règle*; but here, in this palatial hotel, I think we owe it to ourselves to put on something a trifle more—more *recherché*.

Trench.

Why, the steamboat people were the scum of the earth—Americans and all sorts. They may go hang themselves, Billy. I shall not bother about them. (*Takes out his pipe case.*)

Cokane.

Dont call me Billy before people, Trench. My name is Cokane. I am sure they are persons of consequence: you were struck with the distinguished appearance of the father yourself. They are staying here—*here*, Harry, at this hotel. They are out buying photographs, and may be back at any moment.

Trench.

What! those people? (*Puts up his pipe; pulls his coat straight; and glances at his boots.*) Perhaps we *had* better touch ourselves up a little: we look rather the worse for the heat. (*Both rise.*) Too late, by Jove: here she comes with her governor. (*Cokane and Trench retreat. Enter Sartorius* L, *with Blanche,*

and a porter with parcels. The waiter enters from the hotel, with beer.)

SCENE II.

TRENCH, COKANE, WAITER, SARTORIUS, PORTER, BLANCHE.

Sartorius.

(*to porter, indicating* C *table*) Place those things on that table. (*The porter does not understand.*)

Waiter.

These gentlemen are using this table, I think, sir. Would you mind——

Sartorius.

You should have told me so before. (*To Cokane*) I regret the mistake, sir.

Cokane.

Dont mention it, my dear sir: dont mention it. Retain the place, I beg.

Sartorius.

(*coldly turning his back on him*) Thank you. (*To porter*) Place them on *that* table. (*The porter makes no movement until Sartorius points to the parcels and raps the table.*)

Porter.

Ja wohl, gnädige Herr. (*Puts down parcels. Sartorius tips him, and, as he goes out, sits at* L *table and begins to study his Bædeker, taking no further notice of Cokane, whom he evidently wishes to snub. Blanche is already seated at the table, her father being between her and the two men.*)

Cokane.

(*resuming his place at* C *table. Trench does so too*) We are fellow-travellers, if I mistake not.

Sartorius.

(*without looking round*) Indeed ?

Cokane.

Kellner ! Garçon !

Waiter.

Yes sir.

Cokane.

Have you a visitors' book ?

Waiter.

Yes sir. Anything else sir ?

Cokane.

Produce it. (*Exit waiter. Cokane continues to Trench, with emphasis*) I am anxious to ascertain whether this is the hotel your aunt stays at, my dear fellow.

Trench.

What on earth has put that into your head ? Why not ask the waiter, if you really want to know ?

Cokane.

Because it would be indelicate, my dear fellow. It would appear as if I were making a parade of my acquaintance with Lady Roxdale. Good taste forbids, Trench, good taste forbids. (*Aside*) Say something to the old man, Trench : strike up a conversation.

Trench.

I shall do nothing of the sort. I dont know him.

Cokane.

Precisely, dear boy. Then let us get to know him as soon as possible. His daughter is an angel. Havent you a paper to offer them ?

Trench.

I have the *Lancet*.

Cokane.

The *Lancet*! Would you offer a medical paper to the father of that girl? You have no delicacy, Trench. Havent you *Tit Bits*?

Trench.

Yes—the week before last. (*Pulls it out of his pocket.*)

Cokane.

Admirable! they will have forgotten all about the week before last. (*To Sartorius*) Sir: you have perhaps not seen *Tit Bits*. If not, allow me to offer—— (*Hands it.*)

Sartorius.

(*graciously*) Thank you. Blanche: *Tit Bits*. (*She takes it coolly.*) We are fellow-travellers, I believe.

Cokane.

Quite so, quite so. And fellow-countrymen also. We rarely feel the charm of our own tongue until it reaches our ears under a foreign sky. You have no doubt noticed that?

Sartorius.

Hm! From a romantic point of view, possibly, very possibly. As a matter of fact, the sound of English makes me feel at home; and I dislike feeling at home when I am abroad. It is not precisely what one goes to the expense for. I think this gentleman travelled with us also.

Cokane.

(*rising to act as Master of the Ceremonies. Sartorius and Trench rise also*) My valued friend, Dr. Trench.

The strain of a London season on a medical man is enormous. Trench, my dear fellow: allow me to introduce you to—er—?

Sartorius.

Permit me to shake your hand, Dr. Trench. My name is Sartorius; and I have the honor of being known to Lady Roxdale, who is, I believe, a near and dear relative of yours.

Trench.

(*sheepishly*) Yes: she is my aunt; but I dont know about her being particularly fond of me. In fact, I hardly know——

Cokane.

My dear fellow, dont harp on family quarrels: they dont interest Mr. Sartorius. Good taste forbids: good taste forbids. (*Aside*) Do hold your tongue, Harry.

Sartorius.

Blanche. (*She looks up from the paper.*) My friend Dr. Trench. (*They bow.*)

Trench.

Perhaps I should introduce my friend Cokane to you, Mr. Sartorius. (*Cokane makes an elaborate bow. Sartorius accepts it with dignity. The waiter meanwhile re-enters with book and inkstand, which he places on the* R *table.*)

Waiter.

Table d'hôte at 'alf past six, gen'lmen. (*To Trench*) Like anything else now, sir?

Trench.

No, thank you: I'll wait.

Waiter.

Thank *you*, sir. (*Looks at the rest for orders in vain, and exit.*)

Sartorius.

(*to Trench*) We are going to have another look at the river before dinner. If you feel disposed to accompany us——

Cokane.

With pleasure, my dear sir: with the greatest pleasure. (*Moves towards Blanche, who does not look up from her paper.*)

Sartorius.

(*looking at his watch*) We have about half an hour.

Trench.

Is that all? Then we had better start at once.

Sartorius.

So I think. Blanche.

Blanche.

Yes, papa. Quite ready.

Sartorius.

(*to Cokane, who is absorbed in contemplation of Blanche*) You were observing, sir, that——

Cokane.

(*recollecting himself and eagerly joining Sartorius*) —that the pleasures—the glories of this splendid Rhine scenery are doubled by the society of men of taste and the absence of vulgar and intrusive persons. True, sir: very true.

Sartorius.

I made no such remark, Mr. Cokane; but it is not impossible that some reflection of the kind may

have been in my mind. (*Exeunt Cokane and Sartorius by the entrance to the gardens*, L.)

SCENE III.

TRENCH, BLANCHE.

Trench.

I believe I have had the pleasure of meeting you before, Miss Sartorius.

Blanche.

(*ironically*) Indeed?

Trench.

(*injured*) I thought you might have remembered it.

Blanche.

I believe I have had the pleasure of conversing with you for an hour or so on three different occasions, Dr. Trench. I thought you might have remembered it.

Trench.

I do remember it very well, of course.

Blanche.

Oh! I did not catch your recognition of me just now—before we were introduced, I mean.

Trench.

Well, I thought you might not like Mr. Sartorius to know about—that is, I mean—I——

Blanche.

There is no apology needed: I quite understand. You did just what pleased you.

Trench.

I did not: indeed I did not, Miss Sartorius. Not

having been formally introduced to you, I thought I had no right to claim your acquaintance.

Blanche.

It does not matter at all. We had better follow papa, I think.

Trench.

But it *does* matter—at least it does to me. (*Loses confidence*) Perhaps it doesnt to you, though?

Blanche.

Not in the least. Pray dont be uneasy about it.

Trench.

(*offended*) Oh! then perhaps we *had* better rejoin Mr. Sartorius, as you suggest. (*She turns to go, and pauses, waiting for him*) There is of course no reason whatever why you should care.

Blanche.

Papa will wonder what has become of me.

Trench.

I beg your pardon. (*Going with her: stops with a growing sense of injury*) Have I offended you in any way?

Blanche.

(*coolly*) Oh *dear*, no!

Trench.

I thought your tone a good deal colder than when we last met. You remember our last meeting, I hope.

Blanche.

Yes: we were just speaking of it, were we not?

Trench.

Yes, of course. But—but—— Cokane is quite out of sight.

Blanche.

We had better hurry on.

Trench.

Yes, if you like. But I am afraid we shall not be able to overtake them now.

Blanche.

Perhaps not.

Trench.

You see we dont know what direction they have taken, do we?

Blanche.

No.

Trench.

Of course we shall do just as you please; but I think the safest plan is to wait here until they come back. They know where they left us; and if we move, we may lose hours looking for one another in this strange place. But just as you please, of course.

Blanche.

How very thoughtful of you! (*Sits.*)

Trench.

You are chaffing; but I am quite in earnest, I assure you.

Blanche.

I hope so.

Trench.

(*startled by her tone*) Blanche! (*She looks up at him in affected surprise*) I beg your pardon. (*Hesitates a moment and then sits opposite her*) Cokane is a very good fellow, Miss Sartorius.

Blanche.

(*coldly*) Yes, he seems to be a very interesting man.

Trench.

Interesting! Do you think so? I shouldnt have thought that he was particularly interesting. But he is not a bad fellow. No, I assure you: Cokane is a very good fellow—really an uncommonly good fellow. Perhaps he *is* interesting.

Blanche.

I meant interesting as a subject of conversation.

Trench.

(*jealous*) Oh, indeed. Have you been talking much about him of late?

Blanche.

(*out of patience*) I really must go and find papa. (*Rises.*) It is hardly fair to Mr. Cokane to speak so very much of him behind his back.

Trench.

(*to himself*) Been making an ass of myself, it strikes me. (*to her*) I really didnt mean to bore you about Cokane; but it is very difficult to broach a serious topic ten minutes after an introduction.

Blanche.

Is it? You were at no loss the day before you were introduced.

Trench.

You were not indifferent to all my—my prattle on the steamboat, then? I meant everything I said.

Blanche.

It was very interesting. I have written some of it down.

Trench.

What have you written down, if I may ask?

Blanche.

Oh, a great deal—especially about the new germ theory.

Trench.

(*much disappointed*) I had forgotten all about that. I hope I have not been wearying you with my shop. I meant to have talked more about myself. At least, about ourselves, you know. However, perhaps it's as well as it is. (*Distraught*) Yes. But I assure you that Cokane——oh, hang Cokane! I am talking about him again. I beg your pardon. After all, what does it matter? I suppose we shall never see each other again after we part here.

Blanche.

(*hurt*) I suppose not—particularly if you make up your mind not to.

Trench.

Perhaps you think that would be best for us.

Blanche.

I really *will* go and look for papa. (*Rises in a very ill humour.*)

Trench.

One moment. I have something to say that may as well be said now. (*Blanche sits*) I have no idea how you will receive this: it must seem horribly abrupt; but the circumstances do not admit of —the fact is, my utter want of experience—(*he flounders: she waits calmly*) Now, if it were Cokane——

Blanche.

(*rising almost with a bound*) Cokane!

Trench.

No, not Cokane. Though I assure you I was only going to say about him that——

Blanche.

That he will be back presently with papa.

Trench.

(*unnerved again*) Yes, of course. Perhaps I am detaining you.

Blanche.

(*with emphasis, making a last effort to bring him to the point*) Yes. I thought you were detaining me because you had something to say.

Trench.

Not at all. At least, nothing very particular. That is, nothing very particular to you. Another time, perhaps——

Blanche.

What other time? Were we not saying just now that we might never meet again?

Trench.

That is, *you* said, if we made up our minds not to.

Blanche.

(*giving it up*) I do not think there is much danger of *your* making up your mind, Dr. Trench.

Trench.

No: you see I have made it up already. I am glad you have found that out. And you are not angry?

Blanche.

Why should I be angry ?

Trench.

Then I will tell you that I have made up my mind to see you as often as possible. I—(*losing his resolution again*) perhaps I—Cokane is really—no : I dont mean that ; but it is not good for man to be alone—at least not a man like me—I mean a man like you—that is, a woman like me—you—— (*She deliberately puts her hands into his ; and he catches her in his arms.*) Dear Blanche ! (*She hides her face against him : he recovers himself completely and gives a great sigh of relief.*) I thought I should never have said it. I believe I should have stood stammering here all day if you had not helped me out with it.

Blanche.

(*starting away from him*) I *didnt* help you out with it.

Trench.

You helped me unconsciously, or instinctively—by suggestion, as it were, dearest, if you like that better.

Blanche.

I dont like it at all. Besides, you have not said anything. You have only been rather rude.

Trench.

Then let's go through it all over again and make it right this time. (*He kisses her*) There !

Blanche.

(*in his arms*) I thought you were a very shy person. (*Sartorius enters, and observes them with quiet satisfaction. Cokane follows ; starts ; and coughs.*)

SCENE IV.

TRENCH, BLANCHE, SARTORIUS, COKANE.

Sartorius.

I intended you to accompany us, Blanche, in our walk.

Blanche.

Yes, papa. We were just about to start. You cannot have walked very far. (*First dinner bell rings.*)

Sartorius.

The *table d'hôte* will be ready in twenty minutes; and we are rather dusty: we must make ourselves presentable. I think you had better come in with me, my child. Come. (*Exit into hotel with Blanche, who turns to glance at Trench, and is much disgusted to find Cokane between them, looking reproachfully at her.*)

SCENE V.

COKANE, TRENCH.

Cokane.

No, my dear boy. No. No. (*Conveying reprobation of Trench's conduct.*)

Trench.

What the deuce are you No-ing at?

Cokane.

Nothing: I am the last man in the world you could describe as knowing at anything: I am simple as a child, Trench; but I am not blind. I blush for you—was never so ashamed in my life. You have been taking advantage of that unprotected girl.

Trench.

Cokane!

Cokane.

Her father seems to be a perfect gentleman. I obtained the privilege of his acquaintance: I introduced you: I allowed him to believe that he might abandon his daughter to your charge with absolute confidence. And what did I see on our return? —what did her father see? Oh, Trench, Trench! No, my dear fellow, no, no. Bad taste, Harry, bad form!

Trench.

Stuff! There was nothing to see.

Cokane.

Nothing to see! She! a perfect lady, a person of the highest breeding, actually in your arms; and you say there was nothing to see! Have you no principles, Trench? Have you no religious convictions? Have you no acquaintance with the usages of society? You actually kissed——

Trench.

You didnt see me kiss her.

Cokane.

No; but I heard the report, I heard the report. Dont condescend to subterfuge.

Trench.

Nonsense, my dear Billy. You——

Cokane.

There you go again. *Dont* use that low abbreviation. How am I to preserve the respect of fellow-travellers of position and wealth, if I am to be *Billied*

at every turn? My name is William—William de Burgh Cokane.

Trench.

Oh bother! There, dont be offended, old chap. What's the use of putting your back up at every trifle? I only say Billy because it suits you, somehow.

Cokane.

(*mortified*) You have no delicacy of feeling, Trench—no taste. I never mention it to any one; but nothing, I am afraid, will ever make a gentleman of you. (*Enter Sartorius, from the hotel*) Oh no: I am not offended—not in the least. Here is my friend Sartorius, coming, no doubt, to ask you for an explanation of your conduct. I should not have been surprised to see him bring a substantial weapon with him. I shall not intrude on the painful scene. (*Going.*)

Trench.

Dont go, confound it. I dont want to meet him alone just now.

Cokane.

Delicacy, Harry, delicacy. Good taste! *Savoir faire!* (*Exit*, R. *Trench tries to escape by strolling off towards the garden entrance.*)

SCENE VI.

SARTORIUS, TRENCH.

Sartorius.

Are you at leisure for ten minutes or so?

Trench.

(*stopping and turning*) Certainly. Certainly.

Sartorius.

I shall ask you to oblige me with a few words. (*Trench assents. They sit*) Ahem! You have been speaking to my daughter, Dr. Trench.

Trench.

(*with affected ease of manner*) Yes: we had a conversation—quite a chat, in fact—whilst you were taking a turn with Cokane. He is a very good fellow, is Cokane. Oh yes. You see, Miss Sartorius and I had a few scientific discussions on board the steamboat.

Sartorius.

Scientific discussions?

Trench.

Chiefly so. Scientific in the main—in the main.

Sartorius.

I have just had a word with Blanche on the subject, Dr. Trench; and I find her under the impression that something has passed between you which I hardly think is fairly to be described as a scientific discussion. Now my daughter, perhaps foolishly, has taken you quite seriously; and——

Trench.

But——

Sartorius.

One moment, if you will be so good. I have been a young man myself—younger, perhaps, than you would suppose from my present appearance. If you were not serious——

Trench.

But I was perfectly serious. I want to marry your

daughter, Mr. Sartorius. (*Sartorius is again about to put him down; but Trench takes the upper hand, and continues*) Excuse my interrupting you; but that is the long and short of the matter. I hope you dont object.

Sartorius.

So far, no. I may say that your proposal seems to be an honorable and straightforward one, and that it is very gratifying to me personally.

Trench.

Then I suppose we may regard the affair as settled. (*Offers his hand*) It is really very good of you.

Sartorius.

(*avoiding T's hand*) Gently, Dr. Trench, gently. Such a transaction as this cannot be settled off-hand.

Trench.

Not off-hand, no. There are settlements and things, of course. But I only meant that the matter may be regarded as settled between ourselves.

Sartorius.

Hm! Have you nothing further to mention?

Trench.

Only that—that—— no: I dont know that I have, except that I love——

Sartorius.

Anything about your family, for example? You do not anticipate any objection on their part, do you?

Trench.

Oh, they have nothing to do with it.

Sartorius.

Gently, pray: they have a great deal to do with

it. I am resolved that my daughter shall approach no circle in which she would not be received with the full consideration to which her education and her breeding (*here his self-control slips a little*)—I say, her breeding—entitle her.

Trench.

But why are you anxious about that, Mr. Sartorius? My people are thickheaded enough, I grant you; but they are ladies and gentlemen after all, and know what is due to themselves too well to behave rudely even to *my* wife.

Sartorius.

That wont do for me, sir. Families often think it due to themselves to turn their backs on new-comers whom they may not think quite good enough to mix their noble blood with.

Trench.

Blanche's blood is as good as theirs, confound them!

Sartorius.

(*moved*) I am glad you think so. (*Offers his hand. Trench is astonished*) I think so myself. And now, Dr. Trench, since you have acted handsomely, you shall have no cause to complain of me. There shall be no difficulty about money. I dont ask you whether you have a hundred a year or ten thousand: I will guarantee all that. But I must have a guarantee on my side that she will be received on equal terms by your family.

Trench.

Guarantee!

Sartorius.

Yes, a reasonable guarantee. I shall expect you to

write to your relatives explaining your intention, and adding what you think proper as to my daughter's fitness for the best society. When you can shew me a few letters from the principal members of your family, congratulating you in a fairly cordial way, I shall be satisfied. Can I say more?

Trench.

(*much puzzled, but grateful*) No indeed. You are really very good. Many thanks. Since you wish it, I'll write to my people. You will find that they will be as jolly as possible over it. I'll make them write by return. In the meantime——

Sartorius.

In the meantime, I must ask you not to regard the matter as settled.

Trench.

Oh! Not to regard the—— I see. You mean between Blanche and——

Sartorius.

I mean between you and Miss Sartorius. When I interrupted your conversation here some time ago, you and she were evidently regarding it as settled. In case difficulties arise, and the match—you see I call it a match—be broken off, I should not wish Blanche to have to think that she had allowed a gentleman to—to—— (*Trench nods sympathetically. Sartorius continues*) Quite so. May I depend on you to keep a fair distance, and so spare me the necessity of having to restrain an intercourse which has been very pleasant to us all?

Trench.

Certainly, since you prefer it. (*They shake hands.*)

Sartorius.

You will write to-day, I think you said?

Trench.

I will write now, before I leave here—straight off.

Sartorius.

I will leave you to yourself. (*Hesitates, then more firmly*) I am pleased to have come to an understanding with you. (*Exit, as Cokane, who has been hanging about inquisitively, re-enters*).

SCENE VII.

COKANE, TRENCH.

Trench.

Billy, old chap, you are just in time to do me a favor. I want you to draft a letter for me to copy out.

Cokane.

I came with you on this tour as a friend, Trench: not as a secretary.

Trench.

Well, you will write as a friend. It is to my Aunt Maria, about Blanche and me. To tell her, you know.

Cokane.

Tell her about Blanche and you! Tell her about your conduct! Betray you, my friend; and forget that I am writing to a lady? Never!

Trench.

Bosh, Billy: it's all right. We are engaged.

Cokane.

Engaged! To you! Trench: you have cut me

out. You have stolen a march on me. Your behaviour is far from friendly.

Trench.

Why, confound you, you're married. Have you forgotten your wife and your five children?

Cokane.

Do you suppose a married man has no feelings?

Trench.

He has no business to have any of that sort. In any case, Billy, she seems to prefer me; for, as I said, we are engaged.

Cokane.

No doubt, when you have spoken to her behind my back.

Trench.

It isnt usual to broach such subjects before company. As you say yourself, good taste forbids. Ha! ha! Eh? Come, old chap (*coaxing and pushing him into a chair at the* R *table*): here's the pen—just the sort of nib you like. (*Cokane takes the pen and sits down.*) That's right. Thanks awfully, old chap! Be careful how you word it, though, Cokane.

Cokane.

If you doubt my ability to express myself becomingly to Lady Roxdale——

Trench.

All right, old fellow, all right. There's not a man alive who could do it half so well as you. I only wanted to explain. Sartorius has got it into his head, somehow, that my people will snub Blanche; and he wont consent unless they send letters and

invitations and congratulations and deuce knows what not. So just put it in such a way that Aunt Maria will write by return saying she is delighted, and asking us—Blanche and me, you know—to stay with her, and so forth. *You* know what I mean. Just tell her all about it in a chatty way; and——

Cokane.

If you will tell me all about it in a chatty way, I dare say I can communicate it to Lady Roxdale with proper delicacy. What is Sartorius?

Trench.

(*taken aback*) I dont know: I didnt ask. It's a sort of question you cant very well put to a man—particularly a touchy fellow such as he seems to be. Dont you think you could word the letter so as to pass all that over? I really dont like to ask him.

Cokane.

Nothing easier. I can pass over it if you wish. But if you think Lady Roxdale will pass it over, I differ from you. I may be wrong: no doubt I am. I generally am wrong, I believe; but that is my opinion.

Trench.

Confound it! I say, Billy, what the deuce am I to do? Stop: I have an idea. Say he's a gentleman: that wont commit us to anything. If you dwell on his being well off, and Blanche an only child, Aunt Maria will be satisfied.

Cokane.

Henry Trench: when will you begin to get a little sense? This is a serious business. Act responsibly, Harry: act responsibly.

Trench.

Oh bosh! Dont be moral!

Cokane.

I am not moral, Trench. At least I am not a moralist: that is the expression I should have used —moral, but not a moralist. If you are going to get money with your wife, doesnt it concern you to know how that money was made? It is no business of mine: I only throw out the suggestion. Sartorius may be a retired burglar. (*Trench makes an impatient movement*) Oh, I do not say that he is *retired*: how should I know? It is nothing to me. But—— (*Enter Sartorius and Blanche, ready for dinner.*)

Trench.

Sh! Here they come. I wonder whether my promise binds me not to speak to her. (*Blanche leaves Sartorius and strolls away through the garden*) I had better go and explain to her, anyhow. (*Exit after Blanche.*)

SCENE VIII.

COKANE, SARTORIUS.

(*Sartorius comes down and sits at the table opposite Cokane. He reads Bædeker. Cokane, in the agonies of composition, makes hideous faces, and is disconcerted to find Sartorius's eye on him.*)

Sartorius.

I do not disturb you, I hope, Mr. Cokane.

Cokane.

By no means. Our friend Trench has intrusted me with a difficult and delicate task. I may mention that Trench is the friend of my boyhood. Without

wishing to flatter him, I may say that he is my other self.

Sartorius.

Indeed?

Cokane.

Yes. The most perfect confidence exists between us. (*Confidentially*) He has requested me to write to his family on a subject that concerns you.

Sartorius.

Oh, he has left the letter to you, sir, has he? Hm!

Cokane.

Yes. He is a capital fellow, my dear sir, a capital fellow. But family communications like these require good manners. They require taste; and taste is Trench's weak point. He has an excellent heart, but no taste—none whatever. Everything depends on the way the matter is put to Lady Roxdale. But as to that, you may rely on me. I understand the sex.

Sartorius.

I was not fully aware of the closeness of the intimacy between you, Mr. Cokane. Now that I am better informed, I trust I may have the pleasure of seeing you at my house at Surbiton when we return.

Cokane.

(*overwhelmed*) My *dear* sir! You express yourself in the true spirit of an English gentleman.

Sartorius.

I fear I have disturbed you in the composition of your letter. Pray resume it. I shall leave you to

yourself—unless indeed I can assist you in any way —by clearing up any point on which you are not informed, for instance; or even, if I may so far presume on my years, giving you the benefit of my experience as to the best way of wording the matter. I shall always be happy to help any friend of Dr. Trench's, in *any* way, to the best of my ability and of my means.

Cokane.

My dear sir, you are really very good. Trench and I were putting our heads together over the letter just now; and there certainly were one or two points on which we were a little in the dark. But I would not permit Harry to question you. No. I pointed out to him that, as a matter of taste, it would be more delicate to wait until you volunteered the necessary information. (*Looking round.*) By the bye, I see they have given us the slip again. They regard it as quite settled.

Sartorius.

But Dr. Trench has just given me his word not to regard it as quite settled yet.

Cokane.

Ah, my dear sir, it is not the first time I have had to blush for him.

Sartorius.

Hm! Well, Mr. Cokane, as to the letter? You have made a beginning, I see? May I ask what you have said, so far?

Cokane.

"My dear Aunt Maria." That is, Trench's dear Aunt Maria, my friend, Lady Roxdale. You under-

stand I am only drafting a letter for Trench to copy out.

Sartorius.

Quite so. Will you proceed; or would it help you if I were to suggest a word or two?

Cokane.

Your suggestions will be most valuable, my dear sir, immensely valuable.

Sartorius.

I think I should begin in some such way as this. "In travelling with my friend Mr. Cokane up the Rhine,——"

Cokane.

Invaluable, invaluable. The very thing. (*Writes*) "—my friend Mr. Cokane up the Rhine."

Sartorius.

"I have made the acquaintance of"—or you may say "picked up," or "come across," if you think that would suit your friend's style better. We must not be too formal.

Cokane.

"Picked up!" Oh no: too *dégagé*, Mr. Sartorius, too *dégagé*. I should say "had the honor of becoming acquainted with——"

Sartorius.

(*quickly*) By no means: Lady Roxdale must judge of that for herself. Let it stand as I said. "I have made the acquaintance of a young lady, the daughter of——"

Cokane.

(*writing*) "—acquaintance of a young lady, the daughter of"——yes?

Sartorius.

"Of ——" you had better say a gentleman.

Cokane.

(*surprised*) Of course.

Sartorius.

(*with sudden passion*) It is not of course, sir. (*Recovers*) Hm! "——of a gentleman of considerable wealth and position——"

Cokane.

(*writing*) "——and position."

Sartorius.

"which, however, he has made entirely for himself." (*Cokane, struck by this, stares at him instead of writing, and expands his obsequious manner into one of patronage and encouragement.*) Have you written that?

Cokane.

(*resuming his writing*) Yes. Proceed, Sartorius, proceed. Very clearly expressed.

Sartorius.

"The young lady will inherit the bulk of her father's fortune, and will be liberally treated on her marriage. Her education has been of the most expensive and complete kind obtainable; and her surroundings from her birth have been characterized by the strictest refinement. She is in every essential particular——

Cokane.

Excuse the remark; but dont you think this is rather too much in the style of a prospectus of the young lady? I throw out the suggestion as a matter of taste.

Sartorius.

(*troubled*) Perhaps you are right. I am of course not dictating the exact words——

Cokane.

Of course not: of course not.

Sartorius.

——so that you may remodel it to any extent you may see fit. But I desire that there may be no wrong impression as to my daughter's —er —breeding. As to myself——

Cokane.

Oh, it will be sufficient to mention your profession, or pursuits, or—— (*they look pretty hard at one another. Pause.*)

Sartorius.

(*very deliberately*) My income, sir, is derived from the rental of a very extensive real estate in London. Lady Roxdale is one of the head landlords; and Dr. Trench himself holds a mortgage from which, if I mistake not, his entire income is derived.

Cokane.

(*again deferential, but still inquisitive*) What a remarkable coincidence! In what quarter is the demesne situated, did you say?

Sartorius.

In *London*, sir. The management of that estate occupies as much of my time as is not devoted to the ordinary pursuits of a gentleman. (*Rises.*) The rest I leave to your discretion. (*Puts card on table*) That is my address at Surbiton. I shall leave you to yourself. (*Strolls off. Blanche returns, evidently*

annoyed, Trench following. Cokane devotes himself to composition.)

SCENE IX.

COKANE, TRENCH, BLANCHE.

Trench.

Do you find the sun too warm?

Blanche.

No.

Trench.

Look here: your manner is completely changed. I cant help noticing it. What's the matter?

Blanche.

The change has not been on my part. I am not accountable for *your* moods.

Trench.

For *my* moods! Oh Blanche!—I mean, oh Miss Sartorius.

Blanche.

Do you?

Trench.

(*puzzled*) Do I what?

Blanche.

Oh, never mind. Of course if you mean Miss Sartorius——

Trench.

No, I dont *mean* Miss Sartorius. I *say* Miss Sartorius (*looks stealthily to see whether Cokane is listening—finds he is not*) I *mean* Blanche. I mean dearest Blanche—darling Blanche. I didnt mean to be cold: it was only a promise I made to your

father not to regard anything as settled until I hear from my people at home.

Blanche.

Oh, I see. Your family may object to me; and then it will be all over between us. They are almost sure to.

Trench.

(*alarmed*) Dont say that, Blanche: it sounds as if you didnt care. I hope *you* regard it as settled. *You* havent made any promise, you know.

Blanche.

Yes, I have: *I* promised papa too. But I forgot my promise when I met you. I suppose I am not so conscientious as you. And if the matter is not to be regarded as settled, family or no family, promise or no promise, let us break it off here and now.

Trench.

Blanche: on my most sacred honour, family or no family, promise or no promise——

Cokane.

(*interrupting*) Finished, dear boy, finished. (*The second dinner bell sounds.*) Done to a turn, punctually to the second. *C'est fini, mon cher garçon, c'est fini.* (*Sartorius returns.*)

SCENE X.

COKANE, TRENCH, BLANCHE, SARTORIUS.

Sartorius.

Will you take Blanche in, Dr. Trench? (*exit Trench into table d'hôte, taking Blanche*). Can I help you to a stamp, Mr. Cokane? I have some letters

of my own to send. If you will allow me—(*takes out pocket case and begins stamping some letters*).

Cokane.

Thank you; but Trench will have to copy all this out: Lady Roxdale knows his handwriting. He can do it after dinner (*puts the draft in the visitors' book for safe keeping, and shuts it*). Shall I keep you a place next me at table?

Sartorius.

(*still busying himself*) If you will be so good. (*Watches Cokane off; then deliberately opens the visitors' book; takes out the draft letter; and proceeds to read it as the act drop comes down.*)

END OF ACT I.

Act II.

Library in Sartorius's house at Surbiton. Two doors, R *and* C. *Sartorius busy at a writing table, littered with business papers,* L, *near the fireplace, which is decorated for summer. Blanche seated reading The Queen, nearly* C. *Clock strikes eleven. She looks round at it, and resumes her reading inattentively.*

SCENE I.

BLANCHE, SARTORIUS.

Sartorius.

Blanche.

Blanche.

Yes, papa?

Sartorius.

I have some news here. (*Looking for a letter.*)

Blanche.

(*indifferent*) What is it?

Sartorius.

I mean news for you—from Trench.

Blanche.

Indeed?

Sartorius.

"Indeed?" Is that all you have to say to me? Oh, very well. (*Resumes writing. Silence.*)

Blanche.

What do his people say, papa?

Sartorius.

His people? I dont know. (*Still busy. Another pause.*)

Blanche.

What does *he* say, papa?

Sartorius.

He! He says nothing. (*Folds a letter leisurely and looks for the envelope*) He prefers to communicate the result of his—where did I put?—oh, here. Yes, he prefers to communicate the result in person.

Blanche.

(*springing up*) Oh, papa! When is he coming?

Sartorius.

If he walks from the station, he may arrive in the course of the next half-hour. If he drives, he may be here at any moment.

Blanche.

Oh! (*Going hastily.*)

Sartorius.

Blanche.

Blanche.

Yes, papa.

Sartorius.

You will of course not meet him until he has spoken to me.

Blanche.

Of course not, papa. I shouldnt have thought of such a thing.

Sartorius.

That is all. (*She is going, when he puts out his hand, and says with fatherly emotion*) My dear child. (*She responds by going over to kiss him. A tap at the* C. *door*) Come in. (*Enter Lickcheese. He bids Blanche*, Good morning, miss; *and she passes out with a slight and contemptuous recognition of him.*)

SCENE II.

LICKCHEESE, SARTORIUS.

Lickcheese.

Good morning, sir.

Sartorius.

(*harsh and peremptory*) Good morning.

Lickcheese.

(*taking a little sack of money from his bag*) Not much this morning, sir. I have just had the honor of making Dr. Trench's acquaintance, sir.

Sartorius.

(*looking up from his writing, displeased*) Indeed?

Lickcheese.

Yes, sir. Dr. Trench asked his way of me, and was kind enough to drive me from the station.

Sartorius.

Where is he, then?

Lickcheese.

I left him in the hall, with his friend, sir. I should think he is speaking to Miss Sartorius.

Sartorius.

Hm! What do you mean by his friend?

Lickcheese.

There is a Mr. Cokane with him, sir.

Sartorius.

I see you have been talking to him, eh?

Lickcheese.

As we drove along: yes, sir.

Sartorius.

(*sharply*) Why did you not come by the nine o'clock train?

Lickcheese.

I thought——

Sartorius.

It cannot be helped now; so never mind what you thought. But do not put off my business again to the last moment. Has there been any further trouble about the St. Giles' property?

Lickcheese.

The Sanitary Inspector has been complaining again about No. 13 Robbins's Row. He says he will bring it before the vestry.

Sartorius.

Did you tell him that I am on the vestry?

Lickcheese.

Yes, sir.

Sartorius.

What did he say to that?

Lickcheese.

Said he supposed so, or you wouldnt dare to break the law so scand'lous. I only tell you what he said.

Sartorius.

Hm! Do you know his name?

Lickcheese.

Yes, sir. Speakman.

Sartorius.

Write it down in the diary for the day of the next vestry meeting. I will teach Mr. Speakman his duty—his duty to members of the vestry. Let me see the books. (*Lickcheese produces rent book, and hands it to Sartorius; then makes the desired entry in the diary on the table, watching Sartorius with misgiving as the rent book is examined. Sartorius frowns terribly, and rises. Lickcheese quails.*) £1 4*s.* for repairs to No. 13. What does this mean?

Lickcheese.

Well, sir, it was the staircase to the third floor. It was downright dangerous: there werent but three whole steps in it, and no handrail. I thought it best to have a few boards put in.

Sartorius.

Boards! Firewood, sir, firewood! They will burn every stick of it. You have spent twenty-four shillings of my money on firewood for them.

Lickcheese.

There ought to be stone stairs, sir: it would be a saving in the long run. The clergyman says——

Sartorius.

What! *who* says?

Lickcheese.

The clergyman, sir, only the clergyman. Not that I make much account of him; but if you knew how he has worried me over that staircase——

Sartorius.

I am an Englishman ; and I will suffer no clergyman to interfere in my business. (*Turns suddenly on Lickcheese*) Now look here, Mr. Lickcheese ! This is the third time this year that you have brought me a bill of over a pound for repairs. I have warned you repeatedly against dealing with these tenement houses as if they were mansions in a West-end square. I have had occasion to warn you too against discussing my affairs with strangers. You have chosen to disregard my wishes. You are discharged.

Lickcheese.

(*dismayed*) Oh, sir, dont say that.

Sartorius.

(*fiercely*) You are discharged.

Lickcheese.

Well, Mr. Sartorius, it is hard, so it is. No man alive could have screwed more out of them poor destitute devils for you than I have, or spent less in doing it. I have dirtied my hands at it until they're not fit for clean work hardly ; and now you turn me——

Sartorius.

What do you mean by dirtying your hands? If I find that you have stepped an inch outside the letter of the law, Mr. Lickcheese, I shall prosecute you myself. The way to keep your hands clean is to gain the confidence of your employers. You will do well to bear that in mind in your next situation. (*Annie announces* Mr. Trench and Mr. Cokane, *who enter*, c. *Exit Annie.*)

SCENE III.

COKANE, TRENCH, SARTORIUS, LICKCHEESE.

Sartorius.

How do you do, Dr. Trench? Good morning, Mr. Cokane. I am pleased to receive you in my own house. Mr. Lickcheese; you will place your accounts and money on the table: I will examine them and settle with you presently. (*Lickcheese retires to the table, and begins to arrange his accounts, greatly depressed.*)

Trench.

I hope we are not disturbing you.

Sartorius.

Not at all. I fear you have been kept waiting.

Trench.

By no means: we have only just come.

Cokane.

Charming neighbourhood, Mr. Sartorius.

Sartorius.

The air is excellent. Be seated, gentlemen. (*They sit.*)

Trench.

(*pulling out a bundle of letters*) And now, as Mr. Lickcheese knows all about our business, I may as well give you the news at once. I have any amount of letters for you. All my people are delighted to hear that I am going to settle. Aunt Maria wants Blanche to be married from her house.

Sartorius.

Aunt Maria?

Cokane.

Lady Roxdale, my dear sir: he means Lady Roxdale. Do express yourself with a little more taste, my dear fellow.

Trench.

Lady Roxdale, of course. Uncle Harry——

Cokane.

Sir Harry Trench. His godfather, my dear sir, his godfather.

Trench.

Just so. The pleasantest fellow for his age you ever met. He offers us his house at St. Andrews for a couple of months, if we care to pass our honeymoon there. It's the sort of house nobody can live in, you know; but it's a nice thing for him to offer. Dont you think so?

Sartorius.

(*preoccupied with the letters*) No doubt. These seem very gratifying, Dr. Trench.

Trench.

Yes, arent they? Here's Aunt Maria's letter. You see she guessed I didnt compose the letter I sent her. Neither did I. Cokane did it.

Sartorius.

Indeed? Mr. Cokane evidently did it with great taste. I thank him for my part.

Cokane.

No need to thank me for your part. Dont mention it.

Trench.

Aunt Maria says it was just like an attorney's

letter; and she is thankful I dont mean to charge her six and eightpence for it. Ha! ha! Well, what do you say now, Mr. Sartorius? May we regard the matter as settled at last?

Sartorius.

Quite settled. (*Rises and offers his hand.*)

Trench.

I am extremely obliged to you, really.

Cokane.

(*crossing in front of Trench and standing between them with his back to the audience*) Allow me to congratulate you both. (*Shakes hands with them both at the same time.*)

Sartorius.

And now, gentlemen, I have a word to say to my daughter. Dr. Trench: you will not, I hope, grudge me the pleasure of breaking this news to her: I have had to disappoint her more than once since I last saw you. Will you excuse me for ten minutes?

Cokane.

My dear sir!——

Trench.

Certainly. (*Exit Sartorius.*)

SCENE IV.

TRENCH, LICKCHEESE, COKANE.

Trench.

He wont have any news to break, poor old boy: she's read all the letters already.

Cokane.

I must say your behaviour has been far from straightforward, Harry. You have been carrying on a clandestine correspondence.

Lickcheese.

Gentlemen——

Trench and Cokane.

(*turning*) Hallo !

Lickcheese.

Look here, gentlemen. (*To Trench*) You, sir, I address myself to more particular. Will you say a word in my favor to the governor? He has just given me the sack; and I have four children looking to me for their bread. A word from you, sir, on this happy day, might get him to take me on again.

Trench.

Well, you see, Mr. Lickcheese, I dont see how I can interfere. I'm very sorry, of course.

Cokane.

Certainly you cannot interfere. It would be in the most execrable taste.

Lickcheese.

Oh, gentlemen, you are young; and you dont know what loss of employment means to the like of me. What harm would it do you to help a poor man? Just listen to the circumstances, sir. I only——

Trench.

No: I had rather not. Excuse my saying plainly that I think Mr. Sartorius is not a man to act hastily or harshly. I have always found him very fair and

generous ; and I believe he is a better judge of the circumstances than I am.

Cokane.

(*inquisitive*) I think you ought to hear the circumstances, Harry. It can do no harm. Hear the circumstances by all means.

Lickcheese.

Never mind, sir : it aint any use. When I hear that man called generous and fair—well, never mind.

Trench.

If you wish me to do anything for you, Mr. Lickcheese, let me tell you that you are not going the right way about it in speaking ill of Mr. Sartorius.

Lickcheese.

Have I said one word against him, sir ? I leave it to your friend : have I said a word ?

Cokane.

True, true. Quite true. Harry : be just.

Lickcheese.

Mark my words, gentlemen : he'll find what a man he's lost the very first week's rents the new man'll bring him. You'll find the difference yourself, Dr. Trench, if you or your children come into the property. I have got money when no other collector alive would have wrung it out. And now you see the thanks I get for it ! Why, see here, gentlemen ! Look at that bag of money on the table. Hardly a penny of that but there was a hungry child crying for the bread it would have bought. But I got it for him—screwed and worried

and bullied it out of them. I——look here, gentlemen: I'm pretty seasoned to the work; but there's money there that I couldnt have taken if it hadnt been for the thought of my own children depending on me giving him satisfaction. And because I charged him four-and-twenty shillin' to mend a staircase that three women have been hurt on, and that would have got him prosecuted for manslaughter if it had been let go much longer, he gives me the sack. Wouldnt listen to a word, though I would have offered to make up the money out of my own pocket—aye, and am willing to do it still if you will only put in a word for me, sir.

Trench.

You took money that ought to have fed starving children! Serve you right! If I had been the father of one of those children, I'd have given you something worse than the sack. I would not say a word to save your soul, if you have such a thing. Mr. Sartorius was quite right.

Lickcheese.

Just listen to this! Well, you are an innocent young gentleman. Do you suppose he sacked me because I was too hard? Not a bit of it: it was because I wasnt hard enough. I never heard him say he was satisfied yet—no, nor he wouldnt, not if I skinned 'em alive. I dont say he's the worst landlord in London: he couldnt be worse than some; but he's no better than the worst I ever had to do with. And, though I say it, I am better than the best collector he ever done business with. I have screwed more and spent less on his properties than anyone would believe that knows what such pro-

perties are. I know my merits, Dr. Trench, and will speak for myself if no one else will.

Trench.

What sort of properties? Houses?

Lickcheese.

Tenement houses, let from week to week by the room or half room—aye, or quarter room. It pays when you know how to work it, sir. Nothing like it. It's been calculated on the cubic foot of space, sir, that you can get higher rents letting by the room than you can for a mansion in Park Lane.

Trench.

I hope Mr. Sartorius hasnt much of that sort of property, however it may pay.

Lickcheese.

He has nothing else, sir; and he shews his sense in it, too. Every few hundred pound he could scrape together he bought old houses with—houses that you wouldnt hardly look at without holding your nose. He has 'em in St. Giles's: he has 'em in Marylebone: he has 'em in Clerkenwell: he has 'em in Wes'minister: he has 'em in Bethnal Green. Just look how he lives himself, and you'll see the good of it to him. And, mind you, it's me that makes it pay him so well. Catch him going down to collect his own rents! Not likely!

Trench.

Do you mean to say that all his property—*all* his means—come from this sort of thing?

Lickcheese.

Every penny of it, sir. (*Trench sits down overwhelmed.*)

Cokane.

Ah, my dear fellow, the love of money is the root of all evil.

Lickcheese.

Yes, sir; and we'd all like to have the tree growing in our garden.

Cokane.

(*revolted*) Mr. Lickcheese: I did not address myself to you. I do not wish to be severe with you; but there is something peculiarly repugnant to my feelings in the calling of a rent collector.

Lickcheese.

It's no worse than many another. I have my children looking to me.

Cokane.

True: I admit it. So has our friend Sartorius. His affection for his daughter is a redeeming point —a redeeming point, certainly.

Lickcheese.

She's a lucky daughter, sir. Many another daughter has been turned out upon the streets to gratify his affection for her. That's what business is, sir, you see. Come, sir, I think your friend will say a word for me now that he knows I'm not in fault.

Trench.

(*rising angrily*) I will not. It's a damnable business from beginning to end; and you deserve no better luck for helping in it. I have seen it all among the out-patients at the hospital; and it used to make my blood boil to think that such things couldnt be prevented.

Lickcheese.

Oh indeed, sir. But I suppose you will take your share when you marry Miss Blanche, all the same. Which of us is the worse, I should like to know—me that wrings the money out to keep a home over my children, or you that spend it and try to shove the blame on to me?

Cokane.

A most improper observation to address to a gentleman, Mr. Lickcheese. A most revolutionary sentiment.

Lickcheese.

Perhaps so. But then, Robbins's Row aint a school for manners. You collect a week or two there—you're welcome to my place if I cant keep it for myself—and you'll learn a little plain speaking, so you will.

Cokane.

To whom speak you, my good man?

Lickcheese.

I know well enough who I'm speaking to. What do I care for you, or a thousand such? I'm poor: that's enough to make a rascal of me. No consideration for me—nothing to be got by saying a word for me! (*Suddenly cringing to Trench*) Just a word, sir. It would cost you nothing. . (*Sartorius enters at the* C *door, unobserved*) Have some feeling for the poor.

Trench.

I am afraid you have shewn very little, by your own confession.

Lickcheese.

More than your precious father-in-law, anyhow. I——

SCENE V.

TRENCH, LICKCHEESE, SARTORIUS, COKANE.

Sartorius.

You will come here to-morrow not later than ten, Mr. Lickcheese, to conclude our business. I shall trouble you no further to-day. (*Lickcheese, cowed, goes out*, C, *amid dead silence.*)

Sartorius.

(*continuing, after an awkward pause*) He is one of my agents, or rather was; for I have unfortunately had to dismiss him for repeatedly disregarding my instructions. Blanche will be down presently, Harry (*Trench recoils*)—I may take the liberty of calling you so now. What do you say to a stroll through the garden, Mr. Cokane? We are celebrated here for our flowers.

Cokane.

Charmed, my dear sir, charmed. Life here is an idyll—a perfect idyll. Mr. Lickcheese was just dwelling on it. Ahem!

Sartorius.

Harry can follow with Blanche. She will be down directly.

Trench.

No. I cant face her just now.

Sartorius.

Indeed! Ha, ha!

Cokane.

(*aside*) What a devilish unpleasant laugh! It never occurred to me before that he *could* laugh. (*Joins*) Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho!——

Trench.

But you dont understand.

Sartorius.

Oh, I think we do, I think we do. Eh, Mr. Cokane? Ha! ha!

Cokane.

I should think we do. Ha! ha! ha! (*Enter Blanche. Trench, seeing her, gives up the attempt to explain, and collapses into a chair,* R. *Exeunt Sartorius and Cokane,* R, *laughing at him, without noticing Blanche.*)

SCENE VI.

TRENCH, BLANCHE.

Blanche.

Polite of you, Harry, isnt it, to receive me seated?

Trench.

I beg your pardon. (*Rises and offers her a chair,* L.) I was thinking—Wont you sit down?

Blanche.

Is anything the matter? (*She sits,* L. *He goes back to his chair and sits,* R.)

Trench.

No. Oh no.

Blanche.

Papa has not been disagreeable, I hope. You know, Harry, you must have told him that you

hadnt seen me; and he found out from me that that was a story.

Trench.

No: I have hardly spoken to him since he was with you. (*Rises; takes over his chair; plants it near hers; and sits down again*) Blanche: are you fond of money?

Blanche.

Very. Are you going to give me any?

Trench.

Dont make a joke of it: I'm serious. Do you know that we shall be very poor?

Blanche.

Is that what makes you look as if you had neuralgia?

Trench.

It's no laughing matter. Do you know that I have a bare seven hundred a year to live on?

Blanche.

How dreadful!

Trench.

Blanche: it is very serious indeed: I assure you it is.

Blanche.

It would keep me rather short in my housekeeping, dearest boy, if I had nothing of my own. But papa has promised me that I shall be richer than ever when we are married; and he gives me ten pounds a week for the house alone now.

Trench.

We must do the best we can with seven hundred. I think we ought to be self-supporting.

Blanche.

That's just what I mean to be, Harry. If I were to eat up half your £700, I should be making you twice as poor; but I am going to make you twice as rich instead. (*He shakes his head*) Has papa made any difficulty?

Trench.

(*rising with a sigh and taking his chair back to its former place*, R.) No, none at all. (*Sits down dejectedly.*)

Blanche.

Harry: are you too proud to take money from my father?

Trench.

Yes, Blanche: I am too proud.

Blanche.

(*after a pause.*) That is not nice to me, Harry.

Trench.

You must bear with me, Blanche. I—I cant explain. After all, it is very natural.

Blanche.

Has it occurred to you that I may be proud, too?

Trench.

Oh, that is nonsense, dearest. No one will accuse you of marrying for money.

Blanche.

No one would think the worse of me if I did, or of you either. (*She rises and begins to walk restlessly about.*) We really cannot live on seven hundred a year, Harry; and I dont think it is quite fair of you to ask me merely because you are afraid of people talking.

Trench.

It is not that alone, Blanche.

Blanche.

What else is it, then?

Trench.

Nothing. I——

Blanche.

(*getting behind him, and speaking playfully with her hands on his shoulders as she bends over him*) Of course it is nothing. Now dont be absurd, Harry: be good; and listen to me: I know how to settle it. You are too proud to owe anything to me; and I am too proud to owe anything to you. You have seven hundred a year. Well, I will take just seven hundred a year from papa; and then we shall be quits. Now, now, Harry, you know you have not a word to say against that.

Trench.

It is impossible.

Blanche.

Impossible!

Trench.

I cannot explain. I wish you would give me credit for being in the right without asking any questions, dear, though I know that's unreasonable. I have resolved not to take any money from your father.

Blanche.

But he will give the money to me: not to you.

Trench.

It's the same thing. (*Insinuatingly*) I love you

too well to see any distinction. (*Puts up his hand, which she takes over his shoulder.*)

Blanche.

That's a very nice way of putting it, Harry; but I am sure there is something I ought to know. *Has* papa been disagreeable?

Trench.

No: he has been very kind—to me, at least. It is not that. It is nothing that you can guess, Blanche. It would only pain you—perhaps offend you. I do not mean, of course, that we shall live always on seven hundred a year. I will go at my profession in earnest, and work my fingers to the bone.

Blanche.

(*playing with his fingers, still over his shoulder*) But I shouldnt like you with your fingers worked to the bone, Harry. I must be told what the matter is. (*He takes his hand quickly away: she recoils*) I hate secrets; and I dont like to be treated as if I were a child.

Trench.

There is nothing to tell, my love. I do not choose to trespass on your father's generosity: that is all.

Blanche.

You had no objection half an hour ago, when you met me in the hall, and shewed me all the letters. Your family doesnt object. Do *you* object?

Trench.

I do not indeed. It is only a question of money.

Blanche.

(*imploringly*) Harry: there is no use in our fencing in this way. Papa will never consent to my being absolutely dependent on you; and I dont like the idea of it myself. If you even mention such a thing to him, you will break off the match: you will indeed.

Trench.

I cant help that.

Blanche.

You cant help——! Oh, I begin to understand. I will save you the trouble. I will tell papa that *I* have broken off the match; and then there will be no further difficulty.

Trench.

What do you mean, Blanche? Are you offended?

Blanche.

Offended! How dare you ask me?

Trench.

Dare!

Blanche.

How much more manly it would have been to confess that you were trifling with me that time on the Rhine! Why did you come here to-day? Why did you write to your people?

Trench.

Well, Blanche, if you are going to lose your temper——

Blanche.

That is no explanation. You are evading my question. You depended on your family to get you

out of your engagement ; and they did not object, but were only too glad to be rid of you. You were not mean enough to stay away, and not manly enough to tell the truth. You thought you could provoke *me* to break the engagement: that is so like a man—to try and put the woman in the wrong. Well, you have your way. I release you. I wish you had opened my eyes by downright brutality—by striking me—by anything rather than paltering and shuffling as you have done.

Trench.

(*enraged*) Shuffle! Palter! If I had thought you capable of turning on me like this, I should never have spoken to you. I have a good mind never to speak to you again.

Blanche.

You shall not—not ever. I will take care of that. (*Going to the door.*)

Trench.

Blanche : are you going ?

Blanche.

Yes. I am going to get your letters—your false letters, and your presents—your hateful presents, to return them to you. I am very glad it is all broken off.

Trench.

What! (*Exit Blanche.*)

SCENE VII.

TRENCH.

Trench.

"Very glad!" Then, by George, so am I very

glad. "Very glad!" That settles it. I always warned Cokane against women; and I was right. A woman who could say such a thing to a man who loves her—or who did love her when he was a fool —may be pretty, but she has no heart. Not that I care—still——. "Very glad!" It is I who am glad to be out of it, and with more reason: just as glad as she. She cannot pretend that I said anything to hurt her feelings. Some day, perhaps, she will find out how much I have spared her, and what an old rascal her father is. Then she will learn the value of the affection—no matter! I am well out of it: there can be no doubt of that. I had better not see her again: at all events I hope I shant. (*Hears some one at the door*) Here she is back again. (*Enter Cokane*) Oh, it's only you!

SCENE VIII.

COKANE, TRENCH.

Cokane.

Harry, my boy: there's something up—something the matter with Miss Sartorius.

Trench.

You dont mean that she is ill, do you?

Cokane.

Not ill, but agitated, Harry, agitated.

Trench.

So she ought to be. How do you come to know about it?

Cokane.

We met her just now; and Sartorius saw like a

shot that something was up. He is a keen old bird, *rusé*, as the French say, *très rusé*. He stopped to ask her questions; and I, as a matter of good taste, did not listen, but came on here at once to find out all about it from you. If there is anything wrong, Harry, we shall have Sartorius here presently; and then there will be a row.

Trench.

So much the better. I am in the humour for a row. It's all his fault, confound him. (*Enter Sartorius.*)

SCENE IX.

COKANE, TRENCH, SARTORIUS.

Sartorius.

(*aggressively*) Sir——

Trench.

(*still more aggressively*) Well, sir?

Cokane.

(*getting between them*) Gently, my dear boy, gently. Suavity, Harry, suavity.

Sartorius.

(*restraining himself*) If you have anything to say to me, Dr. Trench, I will listen to you patiently. You will then allow me to say what I have to say on my part.

Trench.

(*ashamed*) I beg your pardon. Of course, yes. Fire away.

Sartorius.

Well, sir, I am informed by my daughter that you have refused to fulfil your engagement with her.

Trench.

No: your daughter has refused to fulfil her engagement to me. But the match is broken off, if that is what you mean.

Sartorius.

I should have dismissed this as a lovers' quarrel, Dr. Trench, had not Blanche—who is not wanting in seriousness of character—told me that you have objected on the score of money.

Trench.

It was Miss Sartorius who made that objection. I shouldnt have minded that so much, if it hadnt been for the things she said. She shewed that she does not care *that* for me. (*Snaps his fingers, and grows much excited.*)

Cokane.

Dear boy——

Trench.

Hold your tongue, Billy: it's enough to make a man wish he had never been born. Look here, Mr. Sartorius: I put the matter to her as delicately and considerately as possible, never mentioning a word of my reasons, but just asking her to be content to live upon my own little income; and yet she turned on me as if I had behaved like a savage. But it doesnt matter now.

Sartorius.

Live on your income, sir! Impossible: my daughter is accustomed to a first-rate establishment. Did I not expressly undertake to gratify the expectations I have brought her up to entertain? Did she not tell you I promised her to do so?

Trench.

Yes, I know all about that, Mr. Sartorius; and I am greatly obliged to you; but I had rather not take anything from you except Blanche herself.

Sartorius.

And why did you not say so before?

Trench.

No matter why. Let us drop the subject.

Sartorius.

No matter! But it *does* matter, sir. I insist on an answer. Why did you not say so before?

Trench.

I did not know before.

Sartorius.

(*provoked*) Then you ought to have known your own mind before entering into such a very serious engagement. (*Flings angrily away to the fireplace and back.*)

Trench.

I *ought* to have known! Cokane: is this reasonable? (*Cokane's features are contorted by an air of judicial consideration; but he says nothing; and Trench, again addressing Sartorius, continues*) How the deuce could I have known? You didnt tell me.

Sartorius.

You are trifling with me, sir. You say that you did not know your own mind before.

Trench.

I say nothing of the sort. I say that I did not know where your money came from before.

Sartorius.

You are stating what is not true, sir. I——

Cokane.

Gently, my dear sir. Gently, Harry, dear boy. *Suaviter in modo : fort*——

Trench.

Let him begin, then. What does he mean by attacking me in this fashion ?

Sartorius.

Mr. Cokane : you will bear me out. I was explicit on the point. I said I was a self-made man ; and I am not ashamed of it.

Trench.

You are nothing of the sort. I found out this morning from your man—Lickcheese, or whatever his confounded name is—that your fortune has been made out of a parcel of unfortunate creatures that have hardly enough to keep body and soul together —made by screwing, and bullying, and driving and all sorts of pettifogging tyranny.

Sartorius.

(*outraged*) Sir!

Cokane.

Rent must be paid, dear boy. I have often tried to find a way out of it ; but in vain : it is inevitable, Harry, inevitable.

Sartorius.

(*recovering himself—deliberately*) I am afraid, Dr. Trench, that you are a very young hand at business ; and I am sorry I forgot that for a moment or so. May I ask you to suspend your judgment until we

have had a little quiet discussion of this sentimental notion of yours?—if you will excuse me for calling it so. (*Takes chair* LC, *and motions Trench to another*, RC.)

Cokane.

Very nicely put, my dear sir. Come, Harry, sit down; and consider the matter calmly and judicially. Remember that you are descended from a Chancellor of England. Dont be headstrong.

Trench.

I have no objection to sit down and listen; but I dont see how that can make black white; and I am tired of being turned on as if I were in the wrong. (*Sits down*, RC. *Cokane sits* R.)

Sartorius.

I assume, to begin with, Dr. Trench, that you are not a Socialist, or anything of that sort.

Trench.

Certainly not. I am a Conservative—at least, if I ever took the trouble to vote, I should vote for the Conservative and against the other fellow.

Cokane.

True blue, Harry, true blue!

Sartorius.

I am glad to find that so far we are in perfect sympathy. I am, of course, a Conservative; not a narrow or prejudiced one, I hope, nor at all opposed to true progress, but still a sound Conservative. As to Lickcheese, I need say no more about him than that I have dismissed him from my service this morning for a breach of trust; and you will hardly accept his testimony as friendly or disinterested. As to my business, it is simply to provide homes suited

to the small means of very poor people, who require roofs to shelter them just like other people. Do you suppose I can keep up those roofs for nothing?

Trench.

Yes: that is all very fine; but the point is, what sort of homes do you give them for their money? People must live somewhere, or else go to jail. Advantage is taken of that to make them pay for houses that are not fit for dogs. Why dont you build proper dwellings, and give fair value for the money you take?

Sartorius.

My young friend, these poor people do not know how to live in handsome residences: they would wreck them in a week. You doubt me: try it for yourself. You are welcome to replace all the missing banisters, hand-rails, cistern lids and dusthole tops at your own expense; and you will find them missing again in less than three days—burnt, sir, every stick of them. I do not blame the poor creatures: they need fires, and often have no other way of getting them. But I really cannot spend pound after pound in repairs for them to pull down, when I can barely get them to pay me four and sixpence a week for a room, which is the recognized fair London rent. No, Dr. Trench: when people are very poor, you *cannot* help them, no matter how much you may sympathize with them. It does them more harm than good in the long run. I prefer to save my money in order to provide additional houses for the homeless, and to lay by a little for Blanche. And now, putting that aside for the moment, may I ask what *your* income is derived from?

Trench.

From interest—not from houses. *My* hands are clean as far as that goes. Interest on a mortgage.

Sartorius.

(*forcibly*) Yes: a mortgage on *my* property. When I, to use your own words, screw, and bully, and drive these people to pay what they have freely undertaken to pay me, I cannot touch a penny of the money they give me until I have first paid you your £700 out of it. What Lickcheese did for me, I do for you. He and I are alike intermediaries: *you* are the principal. And yet, Dr. Trench, you have not hesitated to speak contemptuously of me because I have applied my industry and forethought to the management of *our* property, and am maintaining it by the same honourable means.

Cokane.

Admirable, my dear sir, excellent! I felt instinctively that Trench was talking ridiculous nonsense. Let us drop the subject, my dear boy: you only make an ass of yourself when you meddle in business matters. I told you it was inevitable.

Trench.

(*dumfounded*) Do you mean to say that I am just as bad as you are?

Cokane.

Shame, Harry, shame, shame! Grossly bad taste! Be a gentleman. Apologise.

Sartorius.

Allow me, Mr. Cokane. (*To Trench*) If, when you say you are just as bad as I am, you mean that

you are just as powerless to alter the state of society, then you are unfortunately quite right.

Trench.

I suppose that is all I do mean. Well, people who live in glass houses have no right to throw stones. But, on my honor, I never knew that my house was a glass one until you pointed it out. I beg your pardon. (*Offers his hand.*)

Sartorius.

Say no more, Harry: your feelings do you credit: I assure you I feel exactly as you do, myself. Every man who has a heart must wish that a better state of things was practicable. But unhappily it is not.

Trench.

I suppose not.

Cokane.

Not a doubt of it, my dear sir; not a doubt of it. The increase of the population is at the bottom of it all.

Sartorius.

I trust I have convinced you that you need no more object to Blanche sharing my fortune, than I need object to her sharing yours.

Trench.

It seems so. We are all in the same swim, it appears. I hope you will excuse my making such a fuss.

Sartorius.

Not another word. In fact, I thank you for refraining from explaining the nature of your scruples to Blanche: I admire that in you, Harry. Perhaps it will be as well to leave her in ignorance.

Trench.

Very well.

Sartorius.

I may rely upon you?

Trench.

Oh, certainly. I am really greatly relieved to have it all over, and to find that it is I who have been making a fool of myself.

Cokane.

And solely through having disregarded my advice, Harry: remember that.

Sartorius.

I think we may drop the subject. (*Looks at his watch*) Luncheon is overdue, I see. Shall we go and get ready?

Trench.

Thanks, yes. (*All move towards the* C *door.*)

Cokane.

A little discussion always sharpens the appetite. (*Exeunt omnes,* C.)

SCENE X.

BLANCHE.

(*Enter Blanche,* R, *with letters and presents, in great distress. She looks round the room for Trench; exclaims* Gone! *crosses to the table,* R; *and puts down the letters and presents on it. She rings the bell, and then throws herself into her father's chair and buries her face in her hands. Presently she rises impatiently and rings again, twice. She takes up one of the letters, and slowly opens it. At the first glance she tears it up passionately—then begins tearing the others, one after another, with growing rage. Annie*

appears at the C *door, cool, and not pleased at being called at a busy moment.*)

SCENE XI.

ANNIE, BLANCHE.

Annie.

What——

Blanche.

(*hastily interrupting her in an urgent whisper*) Sh-sh ! Come here. I dont want any one to overhear us.

Annie.

(*unsympathetically, advancing about two steps, and not moderating her voice*) What is it, Miss ? We shall never have the table ready ; and Master does go on so if lunch is late.

Blanche.

(*almost beside herself*) Be quiet, I tell you. *Will* you come here ?

Annie.

(*much vexed*) Oh, do please say what you want, Miss; and dont keep me waiting. (*Half aside, muttering*) You're in one of your tantrums again, I sup——(*Blanche flies at her : she runs round the table*) Oh, Miss Blanche, dont, please dont. I'll screa——(*Blanche seizes her by the throat. She falls on her knees, protesting and imploring, but in a carefully subdued voice*) Let me go, Miss Blanche : you know you'll be sorry : you always are. Remember how dreadfully you cut my head last time.

Blanche.

Hold your tongue, I tell you ! Are those two gentlemen gone ?

Annie.

Lickcheese has gone, Miss Blanche, looking dread——

Blanche.

Did I ask you about Lickcheese? Answer me, you white-faced idiot, before I shake your tongue out of your head. Are they gone? (*Shaking her furiously*). ARE—THEY—GONE?

Annie.

(*Crescendo*) N—n—n—n—No. (*Pulling at Blanche's hands*) Oh *do* let me go back to lay the table, Miss Blanche. Master will be so mad; and those two gentlemen staying to lunch, too.

Blanche.

(*relaxing her grasp with a gesture of despair, and standing erect, her eyes wide open in consternation*) He has not gone! (*Annie picks herself up and settles her cap.*)

Annie.

(*safe at the door*) Now youve set my hands all trembling; and I shall jingle the things on the tray so that everybody will notice me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Miss Blanche, so you ought. If your father knew——(*Enter Sartorius*, c. *Annie instantly becomes demure, and gets out as fast as she can by the same door. Blanche has not moved, and heeds nothing until she hears her father address her.*)

SCENE XII.

BLANCHE, SARTORIUS.

Sartorius.

My dear, as we shall all meet at luncheon presently,

I have run down before them to say that I have arranged that little difficulty with Trench. It was only a piece of mischief made by Lickcheese. Trench is a young fool; but it is all right now.

Blanche.

I do not want to marry a fool, papa.

Sartorius.

Then you will have to take a husband over thirty, Blanche. You must not expect too much, my child. You will be richer than your husband, and, I think, cleverer too. I am better pleased that it should be so.

Blanche.

So I've been picked up on the Rhine; dropped here; and now I am picked up again, because, I suppose, I am too rich to be let slip.

Sartorius.

If I thought that!—— No, no, my dear, no. Everything is quite smooth now. In this life things never go quite as we wish them. There, my child, you may give him a scolding if you please; but you must not play fast and loose with your happiness. Most women do it; but I think you have more sense than most women.

Blanche.

Papa.

Sartorius.

Yes, my dear.

Blanche.

May I do as I like about this marriage; or must I do as you like?

Sartorius.

Blanche!

Blanche.

No, papa: you must answer me.

Sartorius.

(*moved*) You shall do as you like now and always, my beloved child. I only wish to do as my own darling pleases.

Blanche.

Then I will not marry him. He has played fast and loose with me. He thinks us beneath him; he is ashamed of us; he dared to object to being benefited by you——as if it were not natural for him to owe you everything; and yet the money tempted him after all. (*Suddenly throwing her arms about his neck*) Papa: I dont want to marry: I only want to stay with you and be happy as we have always been. I hate the thought of being married: I dont care for him: I dont want to leave you. (*Enter Trench and Cokane, unnoticed.*) Only send him away: promise me that you will send him away and keep me here with you as we have always—— (*seeing Trench*) Oh! (*She hides her face on her father's breast*).

SCENE XIII.

COKANE, TRENCH, BLANCHE, SARTORIUS.

Trench.

I hope we are not intruding here.

Sartorius.

Dr. Trench: my daughter has changed her mind.

Trench.

It was I that she asked you to send away, then? (*No reply.*)

Cokane.

(*in his most vinegary manner*) I think, Harry, that, under the circumstances, we have no alternative but to seek luncheon elsewhere.

Trench.

But, Mr. Sartorius, have you explained——?

Sartorius.

I have explained, sir. Good morning. (*Trench, outraged, advances a step. Blanche sinks away from her father into a chair. Sartorius stands his ground rigidly.*)

Trench.

(*turning away indignantly*) Come on, Cokane.

Cokane.

Certainly, Harry, certainly. (*Exit Trench, C. Annie, with a tray jingling in her hands, passes outside*). You have disappointed me, sir, very acutely. Good morning. (*Exit, C.*)

END OF ACT II.

Act III.

The Drawing-room. Winter evening: curtains drawn and lamps lighted. Sartorius and Blanche sitting glumly near the fire R. *Small table between them. Annie has just brought in coffee, and is placing the things near Blanche. Larger table in centre. Pianoforte at the back, with photographic portrait of Blanche on miniature easel on the top. Two doors, one,* R, *leading to library, the other,* L, *to lobby. Blanche,* RC, *has her work-basket on the smaller table before her, but is staring across the table into the fireplace, with her face propped on her elbows. Sartorius,* R, *at the other side of the table, close to the fire, has a newspaper, and sits a little farther up than Blanche. Annie goes out; and he looks at Blanche once or twice anxiously before the silence is broken.*

SCENE I.

SARTORIUS, BLANCHE.

Sartorius.

Blanche, my love.

Blanche.

Yes.

Sartorius.

I had a long talk with the doctor to-day about our going abroad.

Blanche.

(*impatiently, and at once taking her elbows off the table and changing her attitude*) I am quite well; and I will not go abroad. The very thought of the Continent makes me sick. Why *will* you bother me so about my health?

Sartorius.

It was not about your health, Blanche, but about my own.

Blanche.

Yours! Oh, papa, there is nothing the matter with you, I hope?

Sartorius.

There will be—there must be, Blanche, long before you begin to consider yourself an old woman.

Blanche.

But there is nothing the matter now.

Sartorius.

Well, my dear, the doctor says I need change, travel, excitement——

Blanche.

(*rising*) Excitement! *You* need excitement! (*Goes over and sits at his feet*) How is it, papa, that you, who are so clever with everybody else, are not a bit clever with me? Do you think I cannot see through your little plan to take me abroad? Since I will not be the invalid and allow you to be the nurse, you are to be the invalid and I am to be the nurse.

Sartorius.

Well, Blanche, if you will have it that you are well and have nothing preying on your spirits, I must insist on being ill and having something prey-

ing on mine. And indeed, my girl, there is no use in our going on as we have for the last four months. You have not been happy; and I have been far from comfortable.

Blanche.

I thought you admired inflexibility, papa: you have always prided yourself on it.

Sartorius.

Nonsense, my dear, nonsense. I have had to give in often enough. And I could shew you plenty of soft fellows who have done as well as I, and enjoyed themselves more, perhaps. If it is only for the sake of inflexibility that you are standing out——

Blanche.

I am not standing out, papa. I dont know what you mean. (*She tries to rise and go away; but he catches her arm and arrests her on her knees, so that they are face to face.*)

Sartorius.

Come, my child: you must not trifle with me as if I were a stranger. You are fretting because——

Blanche.

(*violently twisting herself free and speaking as she rises*) If you say it, papa, I will kill myself. It is not true. If he were here on his knees to-night, I would walk out of the house sooner than endure it. (*Exit excitedly. Sartorius greatly troubled.*)

SCENE II.

SARTORIUS.

Sartorius.

Now if I fight it out with her, no more comfort

for months: I might as well live with my clerk or my servant. And if I give in now, I shall have to give in always. Well, I cannot help it. I have stuck to having my own way all my life; but there must be an end to that drudgery some day. She is young: let her have her turn at it. (*Enter Annie*, L.) Yes?

SCENE III.

SARTORIUS, ANNIE.

Annie.

Please, sir, Mr. Lickcheese wants to see you very particular. On important business—*your* business, he told me to say.

Sartorius.

Mr. Lickcheese! Do you mean Lickcheese who used to come here on my business?

Annie.

Yes, sir. But indeed, sir, you'd scarcely know him.

Sartorius.

(*frowning*) Hm! Starving, I suppose. Come to beg.

Annie.

(*intensely repudiating the idea*) O-o-o-o-h no, sir. Quite the gentleman, sir! Sealskin overcoat, sir! Come in a hansom, all shaved and clean! I'm sure he's come into a fortune, sir.

Sartorius.

Hm! Shew him up. (*Exit Annie.*) Now what does this mean, I should like to know? (*Threateningly*) If he has come here to beg——

(*Enter Lickcheese*, L, *shewn in by Annie, who goes*

out again. New hat, new gloves, overcoat with astrakan collar, heavy gold chain: he has shaved his whiskers and grown a moustache, the ends of which are waxed and pointed. Sartorius stares speechless at him: he enjoys the effect he produces and stands smiling to be admired.)

SCENE IV.

SARTORIUS, LICKCHEESE.

Sartorius.

(*bracing himself—hostile*) Well?

Lickcheese.

Quite well, Sartorius, thankee.

Sartorius.

I was not asking after your health, sir, as you know, I think, as well as I do. What is your business?

Lickcheese.

Business that I can take elsewhere if I meet with less civility than I please to put up with, Sartorius. You and me is man and man now. It was money that used to be my master, and not you, dont think it. Now that I'm independent in respect of money——

Sartorius.

(*crossing determinedly to the* L *door, and holding it open*) You can take your independence out of my house then. I wont have it here.

Lickcheese.

Come, Sartorius, dont be stiffnecked. I come here as a friend to put money in your pocket. No use in your lettin' on to me that youre above money. Eh?

Sartorius.

(*hesitates, and at last shuts the door, saying guardedly*) How much money?

Lickcheese.

(*crossing to Blanche's chair*) Ah! there you speak like yourself, Sartorius. Now suppose you ask me to sit down and make myself comfortable.

Sartorius.

(*coming from the door to* LC) I have a mind to put you downstairs by the back of your neck, you infernal blackguard.

Lickcheese.

(*not a bit ruffled, takes off his overcoat and hangs it on the back of Blanche's chair, pulling a cigar case out of one of the pockets as he does so*) You and me is too much of a pair for me to take anything you say in bad part, Sartorius. 'Ave a cigar?

Sartorius.

No smoking here: this is my daughter's room. However, sit down, sit down. (*They sit.*)

Lickcheese.

I've bin gettin' on a little since I saw you last.

Sartorius.

So I see.

Lickcheese.

I owe it partly to you, you know. Does that surprise you?

Sartorius.

It doesnt concern me.

Lickcheese.

So you think, Sartorius, because it never did con-

cern you how *I* got on, so long as I got *you* on by bringing in the rents. But I picked up something for myself down at Robbins's Row.

Sartorius.

Oh, have you come to make restitution then?

Lickcheese.

Ha! ha! You always would have your joke, Mr. Sartorius. No: what I picked up was a knowledge of the great public question of the Housing of the Working Classes, that a Royal Commission is now holding an inquiry into.

Sartorius.

Oh, I see. You have been giving evidence, have you?

Lickcheese.

Giving evidence! Not me. What good would that do me? Only my expenses; and that not on the professional scale, neither. No: I gave no evidence. But I'll tell you what I did. I kep' it back, jest to oblige one or two people whose feelings would have been hurt by seeing their names in a blue book as keeping a fever den. Their Agent got so friendly with me over it that he put his name on a bill of mine to the tune of——well, no matter: it gave me a start; and a start was all I ever wanted to get myself on. But that parson went on cruel about Robbins's Row. I've got a copy of the first report of the Commission in the pocket of my overcoat. (*Rises and gets at his overcoat, from a pocket of which he takes a blue book*) I turned down the page to shew you: I thought you would like to see it. (*Doubles the book back at the place indicated, and hands it to Sartorius.*)

Sartorius.

(*putting the book on the table without looking at it, and striking it emphatically with his fist*) I dont care *that* for my name being in blue books. My friends dont read them; and I'm neither a Cabinet Minister nor a candidate for Parliament. There is nothing to be got out of me on that lay.

Lickcheese.

Oh, Mr. Sartorius, do you think I would let out a word about your premises? Round on an old pal! no: that isnt Lickcheese's way. Besides, they know all about you already. Them stairs that you and me quarrelled about, they was a whole afternoon examining the clergyman that made such a fuss—you remember?—about the women that was hurt on it. He made the worst he could of it, in an ungentlemanly, unchristian spirit. I wouldnt have that clergyman's disposition for worlds. Oh no, that's not what was in my thoughts.

Sartorius.

Come, come, man: what *was* in your thoughts? Out with it.

Lickcheese.

(*with provoking deliberation, smiles and looks mysteriously at him*) You aint spent a few hundreds in repairs since we parted, have you? (*Movement of impatience from Sartorius: Lickcheese goes on soothingly*) Now, dont fly out at me. I know a landlord that owned as beastly a slum as you could find in London, down there by the Tower. By my advice that man put half the houses into first-class repair, and let the other half to a new Company—the North

Thames Iced Mutton Depôt Company, of which I held a few shares—promoter's shares. And what was the end of it, do you think?

Sartorius.

Smash, I suppose.

Lickcheese.

Smash! not a bit of it. Compensation, Mr. Sartorius, compensation. Do you understand that?

Sartorius.

Compensation for what?

Lickcheese.

Why, the land was wanted for an extension of the Mint; and the Company had to be bought out, and the buildings compensated for. Somebody has to know these things beforehand, you know, no matter how dark theyre kept.

Sartorius.

(*interested, but cautious*) Well?

Lickcheese.

Is that all you have to say to me, Mr. Sartorius? "Well"! as if I was next door's dog! Suppose I'd got wind of a new street that would knock down Robbins's Row and turn Burke's Walk into a frontage worth thirty pound a foot—and I may know of such a thing for all you guess—would you say no more to me than (*mimicking*) "Well"? (*Sartorius rises; hesitates; and looks at him in great doubt: Lickcheese watches him cunningly.*) Come, look at my get-up, Mr. Sartorius. Look at this watch-chain! Look at the corporation I've got on me!

Do you think all that came from keeping my mouth shut? No, it came from keeping my ears and eyes open. (*Enter Blanche with Annie, who has a silver tray on which she collects the coffee cups.*)

SCENE V.

ANNIE, LICKCHEESE, SARTORIUS, BLANCHE.

Sartorius.

Sh! We must talk this over in the study. There is a good fire there; and you can smoke. Blanche: an old friend of ours.

Lickcheese.

And a kind one to me. I hope I see you well, Miss Blanche.

Blanche.

Why, it's Mr. Lickcheese! I hardly knew you.

Lickcheese.

I find you a little changed yourself, Miss.

Blanche.

(*hastily*) Oh, I am the same as ever How are Mrs. Lickcheese and the chil——

Sartorius.

(*impatiently*) We have business to transact, Blanche. You can talk to Mr. Lickcheese afterwards. Come on. (*Exeunt Sartorius and Lickcheese into library*, R. *Blanche is a little surprised at her father's abruptness. She looks after them for a moment. Then, seeing Lickcheese's overcoat on her chair, she takes it up, amused, and looks at the fur.*)

SCENE VI.

BLANCHE, ANNIE.

Annie.

Oh, we *are* fine, aint we, Miss Blanche? I think Mr. Lickcheese must have come into a legacy. (*Seeing the blue book*) Is this Master's, Miss Blanche? I suppose I'd best leave it where it is.

Blanche.

No, it must be Mr. —— let me see. (*Bends over the open book*) There's something about papa in it. (*Sits down and begins to read.*)

Annie.

He looks ever so much younger, Miss Blanche, dont he? I couldnt help laughing when I saw him with his whiskers shaved off: it do look so silly when you're not accustomed to it. (*No answer from Blanche*) You havent finished your coffee, Miss: I suppose I may take it away. (*No answer*) Oh, you *are* interested in Mr. Lickcheese's book, Miss. (*Blanche stands up, staring—terrible—the book hanging in her hands. Annie looks round her up into her face, and instantly hurries out of the room on tiptoe with her tray.*)

SCENE VII.

BLANCHE.

Blanche.

So that was why he would not touch the money. (*She tries to tear the book across; but that is impossible; and she throws it down violently into the fireplace. It falls into the fender*) He left me

because of my father's business—because I was not good enough for his family. Oh, if only a girl could have no father, no family, just as I have no mother! I suppose he read that book. That miserable clergyman! "The worst slum landlord in London." "Slum landlord." Oh! (*Covers her face with her hands and sinks shuddering into the chair on which the overcoat lies. Hearing the door open, she snatches a half-hemmed handkerchief from her work-basket and sits erect and quiet, stitching at it. Enter Sartorius and Lickcheese,* R.)

SCENE VIII.

SARTORIUS, LICKCHEESE, BLANCHE.

Lickcheese.

By your leave, Miss Blanche. (*Pulling gently at his overcoat.*)

Blanche.

(*rising*) I beg your pardon. I hope I havent crushed it.

Lickcheese.

(*with the coat on*) You're welcome to crush it again, Miss Blanche. Dont say good evening to me, Miss: I'm coming back presently—me and a friend or two. Ta ta, Sartorius: I wont be long. (*Exit,* L.)

SCENE IX.

SARTORIUS, BLANCHE.

Blanche.

I thought we were done with Lickcheese. (*Sartorius is looking about for the blue book.*)

Sartorius.

Not quite yet, I think. He left a book here for me to look over—a large book in a blue paper cover. Has Annie put it away? (*Sees it in the fender; looks at her; and adds*) Have *you* seen it?

Blanche.

No. Yes. (*angrily*) No: I have not seen it. What have I to do with it? (*Sartorius picks the book up and dusts it; then sits down quietly and begins to read.*

Sartorius.

It is a curious thing, Blanche, that the Parliamentary gentlemen who write such books as these, should be so ignorant of practical business. One would suppose, to read this, that we are the most grasping, grinding, heartless pair in the world, you and I.

Blanche.

Then it is not true—about the state of the houses, I mean?

Sartorius.

(*calmly*) Oh, quite true. Quite true.

Blanche.

Then it is not our fault?

Sartorius.

My dear, if we made the houses any better, the rents would have to be raised so much that the poor people would be unable to pay, and would be thrown homeless on the streets.

Blanche.

Well, turn them out and get in a respectable class

of people. Why should we have the disgrace of harbouring such wretches?

Sartorius.

(*opening his eyes*) That sounds a little hard on them, doesnt it, my child?

Blanche.

Oh, I hate the poor. At least, I hate those dirty, drunken, disreputable people who live like pigs. If they must be provided for, let other people look after them. How can you expect any one to think well of us when such things are written about us in that infamous book?

Sartorius.

(*wistfully*) I see I have made a real lady of you, Blanche.

Blanche.

Well, are you sorry for that?

Sartorius.

No, my dear, of course not. But do you know, Blanche, that my mother was a very poor woman, and that her poverty was not her fault?

Blanche.

I suppose not; but the people we want to mix with now do not know that. And it was not my fault; so I do not see why I should be made to suffer for it.

Sartorius.

(*enraged*) Who makes you suffer for it, Miss? What would you be now but for what your grandmother did for me when she stood at her wash-tub for thirteen hours a day and thought herself rich when she made fifteen shillings in a week?

Blanche.

(*angrily*) I suppose I should have been down on her level, instead of raised above it, as I am now. Would you like us to go and live in that place in the book for the sake of grandmamma? I hate the idea of such things. I dont want to know about them. I love you because you brought me up to something better. (*Half aside, as she turns away from him*) I should hate you if you had not.

Sartorius.

(*giving in*) Well, my child, it is natural for you to feel that way, after your bringing up. It is the ladylike view of the matter. So dont let us quarrel, my girl. You see, you think of me only as a father; but I am a man as well, Blanche; and it is not always the same thing. You dont understand that, do you, my dear? However, you shall not be made to suffer any more. I have made up my mind to improve the property, and get in quite a new class of tenants. There! does that satisfy you? I am only waiting for the consent of the ground landlord, Lady Roxdale.

Blanche.

Lady Roxdale!

Sartorius.

Yes. And I shall expect the mortgagee, who professes to feel strongly on the subject of the housing of the working classes, to take his share of the risk. His mortgage makes him practically my sleeping partner in the ownership.

Blanche.

I never knew there was any other owner. Who is he?

Sartorius.

Harry Trench.

Blanche.

What! He! And he is responsible too, for all that in the book—as responsible as we are?

Sartorius.

Equally responsible with me, dear. You are not responsible at all. Master Harry had not thought of that until I pointed it out to him. That is why he first wanted to support you on his own money alone, and then apologized to me for his folly.

Blanche.

Why did you not tell me this before?

Sartorius.

You told me, Blanche, that you did not want him—that you preferred to stay with me.

Blanche.

Neither do I want him. He insulted us.

Sartorius.

He apologized, my girl. And if he consents to join me in my scheme, I shall have to be friends with him.

Blanche.

And to ask him to the house?

Sartorius.

Only on business. You need not meet him unless you like. But there is no time to be lost; and I could not help asking him to call here to-night.

Blanche.

To-night! To-night!!!

Sartorius.

Lickcheese has gone to ask him to come round.

Blanche.

Then he will be here in a few minutes. What shall I do?

Sartorius.

I advise you to receive him as if nothing had happened, and then go out and leave us to our business. You must meet him sooner or later. You are strong-minded enough for that, are you not, my dear? You are not afraid to meet him?

Blanche.

Afraid! No, most certainly not. But—— (*Lickcheese's voice is heard without*) Here they are. Dont say I'm in, papa. (*Rushes off*, R. *Enter Lickcheese*, L, *with Trench and Cokane. Cokane shakes hands with Sartorius; Trench, who is sulky, merely bowing. They all sit round the large table, Trench* R, *Cokane* L, *the other two between them, with Lickcheese next Cokane.*)

SCENE X.

TRENCH, SARTORIUS, LICKCHEESE, COKANE.

Lickcheese.

Here we are, all friends round St. Paul's. You remember Mr. Cokane: he does a little business for me now, and gives me a help with my correspondence —sekketary we call it. I've no litery style, and that's the truth; so Mr. Cokane kindly puts it into my letters and draft prospectuses and advertisements and the like. Dont you, Cokane? Of course you do: why shouldnt you? He's been helping me

to-night to persuade his old friend, Dr. Trench, about that matter we were speaking of.

Cokane.

No, Mr. Lickcheese, not trying to persuade him. No: this is a matter of principle with me. I say it is your duty, Henry—your *duty*—to put those abominable buildings into proper and habitable repair. As a man of science you owe it to the community to perfect the sanitary arrangements. In questions of duty there is no room for persuasion, even from the oldest friend.

Sartorius.

(*to Trench*) I certainly feel, as Mr. Cokane puts it, that it is our duty—one which I have perhaps too long neglected out of regard for the poorest class of tenants.

Lickcheese.

Not a doubt of it, gents, a duty. I can be as sharp as any man when it's a question of business; but duty is another thing.

Trench.

Well, I dont see that it is any more my duty now than it was four months ago. I look at it simply as a question of so much money.

Cokane.

Shame, Harry, shame! Shame!

Trench.

Oh, shut up, you fool. (*Cokane springs up. Lickcheese catches his coat and holds him.*)

Lickcheese.

Steady, steady, Mr. Sekketary. Dr. Trench is only joking. He dont do himself justice.

Cokane.

I insist on the withdrawal of that expression. (*Lickcheese, reassured, releases him.*) I have been called a fool.

Trench.

So you are a fool.

Cokane.

Then you are a damned fool. Now, sir !

Trench.

All right. Now we've settled that. (*Cokane, with a snort, sits down*) What I mean is this. Dont let us have any nonsense about the job. As I understand it, we have got a straight tip from Mr. Lickcheese that Robbins's Row is to be pulled down to make way for the new street into the Strand; and that, if we dont look out, this confounded meddling County Council will swindle us out of our proper compensation on the ground that it's against public policy to recognize vested interests in squalor and filth and poverty and all the rest of it.

Sartorius.

I should not put it exactly in that way ; but——

Cokane.

Quite right, Mr. Sartorius, quite right. The case could not have been stated in worse taste or with less tact.

Lickcheese.

Sh—sh—sh—sh !

Sartorius.

I do not quite go with you there, Mr. Cokane. I feel that there is much to be said for the view

taken by the County Council. We live in a progressive age; and humanitarian ideas are advancing and must be taken into account. I should hardly feel justified in making a large claim for compensation under existing circumstances.

Lickcheese.

Of course not; and you wouldnt get it if you did. You see, it's like this, Dr. Trench. There's no doubt that the Vestries has legal powers to play old Harry with slum properties, and spoil the houseknacking game if they please. That didnt matter in the good old times, because the Vestries used to be us ourselves. Nobody ever knew a word about the election; and we used to get ten of us into a room and elect one another, and do what we liked. Well, that cock wont fight any longer; because the tag rag and bobtail are beginning to meddle in the elections; and the County Council is full of red radical republican revolutionists that wants to cut us out by building what they calls municipal dwellings; while even the respectable party—actually people that calls themselves gentlemen—wants to make us put our properties into repair! That County Council is a curse to property owners all over London. However, there it is hanging over our heads; and, to put it short, the game is up for men in the position of you and Mr. Sartorius. My advice to you is, take the present chance of getting out of it. Spend a little money on the block at the Cribbs Market end—enough to make it look like a model dwelling; and let the other block to me on fair terms for a depôt of the North Thames Iced Mutton Company. They'll be knocked down inside of two years to make room for

the new north and south main thoroughfare; and you'll be compensated to the tune of double the present valuation, with the cost of the improvements thrown in. Leave things as they are; and you stand a good chance of being fined, or condemned, or pulled down before long. Now's your time.

Cokane.

Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Admirably put from the business point of view. I recognize the uselessness of putting the moral point of view to you, Trench; but even you must feel the cogency of Mr. Lickcheese's business statement.

Trench.

But why cant you act without me? What have I got to do with it? I am only a mortgagee.

Sartorius.

There is a certain risk in this compensation investment, Dr. Trench. The County Council may alter the line of the new street. If that happens, the money spent in improving the houses will be thrown away—simply thrown away. But you will expect your seven per cent. as usual.

Trench.

Certainly. I find it hard enough to get on as it is. Hang it all, a fellow must live.

Cokane.

Je n'en vois pas la nécessité.

Trench.

Shut up, Billy, or else speak some language that you understand. No, Mr. Sartorius: I should be very glad to stand in with you if I could afford it; but I cant; so there's an end of that.

Lickcheese.

Well, all I can say is that youre a very foolish young man.

Cokane.

What did I tell you, Harry?

Trench.

I dont see that it's any business of yours, Mr. Lickcheese.

Lickcheese.

It's a free country: every man has a right to his opinion. (*Cokane cries* Hear hear!) Come, where's your feelings for them poor people, Dr. Trench? Remember how it went to your heart when I first told you about them. What! are *you* going to turn hard?

Trench.

No: it wont do: you cant get over me in that way. You proved to me before that there was no use in being sentimental over that slum shop of ours; and it's no good your turning round on the opposite tack now that you want to get me to put my capital into your speculation. I've had my lesson; and I'm going to stick to my present income. It's little enough for me as it is.

Sartorius.

It really matters nothing to me, Dr. Trench, how you decide. I can easily raise the money elsewhere and pay you off. Then, since you are resolved to run no risks, you can invest your £10,000 in Consols and get £250 a year for it instead of £700.

Cokane.

This is what comes of being avaricious, Harry.

Two-thirds of your income gone at one blow. And I must say it serves you right.

Trench.

That's all very fine; but I dont understand it. If you can do this to me, why didnt you do it long ago?

Sartorius.

Because, as I should probably have had to borrow at six per cent., I should only have saved £100 a year, which is a trifle to me; whereas you would have lost over £400—a very serious matter for you. I had no desire to be unfriendly; and even now I should be glad to let the mortgage stand, were it not that the circumstances mentioned by Mr. Lickcheese force my hand. Besides, Dr. Trench, I hoped for some time that our interests might be joined by closer ties even than those of friendship.

Lickcheese.

(*jumping up, relieved*) There! Now the murder's out. Excuse me, Dr. Trench. *Ex*-cuse me, Mr. Sartorius, excuse my freedom. Why not Dr. Trench marry Miss Blanche, and settle the whole affair that way? (*Sensation. Lickcheese sits down, triumphant.*)

Cokane.

You forget, Mr. Lickcheese, that the young lady, whose taste has to be considered, decisively objected to him. Trench quite mistook the situation at that time. The young lady was attracted in another quarter.

Trench.

Oh! In *your* quarter, I suppose?

Cokane.

I do not say so, Trench. No man of any delicacy

would suggest such a thing. I said another quarter. You have an untutored mind, Trench, an untutored mind.

Trench.

Well, Cokane, I've told you my opinion of you already.

Cokane.

(*rising wildly*) And I have told *you my* opinion of you. I will repeat it if you wish. I am ready to repeat it.

Lickcheese.

Come, Mr. Sekketary, you and me, as married men, is out of the hunt as far as young ladies is concerned. I know Miss Blanche: she has her father's eye for business. Explain this job to her; and she'll make it up with Dr. Trench. Why not have a bit of romance in business when it costs nothing? We all have our feelings: we aint mere calculating machines.

Sartorius.

(*revolted*) Do you think, Lickcheese, that my daughter is to be made part of a money bargain between you and these gentlemen?

Lickcheese.

Oh come, Sartorius: dont talk as if you was the only father in the world. I have a daughter too; and my feelings in that matter are just as fine as yours. I propose nothing but what is for Miss Blanche's advantage and for Dr. Trench's. I take their feelings for granted: they aint our business.

Cokane.

Lickcheese expresses himself roughly, Mr. Sartorius;

but his is a sterling nature; and what he says is to the point. If Miss Sartorius can really bring herself to care for Harry, even as a last resource, I am far from desiring to stand in the way of such an arrangement.

Trench.

Why, what have you got to do with it?

Lickcheese.

Easy, Dr. Trench, easy. We want your opinion. Are you still on for marrying Miss Blanche if she is agreeable?

Trench.

(*shortly*) I dont know that I am. (*Sartorius rises indignantly.*)

Lickcheese.

Easy one moment, Mr. Sartorius. (*to Trench*) Come, Dr. Trench: you say you dont know that you are. But do you know that you aint: that's what we want to know?

Trench.

(*sulkily*) I wont have the relations between Miss Sartorius and myself made part of a bargain. (*Rises to leave the table.*)

Lickcheese.

(*rising*) That's enough: a gentleman could say no less. Now, would you mind me and Cokane and the gov'nor steppin' into the study to arrange about the lease to the North Thames Iced Mutton Company? That doesnt interest you, you know. You wont mind us leaving you alone a bit just to think over whether you can see your way to stand in after all.

Trench.

But I may as well go home now if you have business. There's nothing else to say.

Lickcheese.

No, dont go. Only just a minute: me and Cokane will be back in no time to see you home. You'll wait for us, wont you ? there's a good fellow.

Trench.

Oh, if you wish, yes.

Lickcheese.

Didnt I know you would !

Sartorius.

(*at the door*, R, *to Cokane*) After you, sir. (*Cokane bows formally and goes into the study.*)

Lickcheese.

(*at the door, aside to Sartorius*) You never had such a managing man as me, Sartorius. (*Goes out chuckling, followed by Sartorius.*)

SCENE XI.

TRENCH, BLANCHE.

(*Trench, left alone, takes to prowling round the room in search of relics of Blanche, who presently appears at the door*, L, *and stands watching him. Finding the handkerchief in her work-basket, he picks it up, and is raising it to his lips when he perceives the needle sticking in it. He carefully removes this, and is again about to kiss the handkerchief when he suddenly changes his mind and throws it angrily away, Blanche following the whole process intently. He wanders to the pianoforte and finds the photograph on the miniature easel*

there. He contemplates it; snaps his fingers at it; raises it to his lips; checks himself and is about to throw it away like the handkerchief; then breaks down and kisses it passionately. Triumph in Blanche's face. At last he turns L, *and, finding himself face to face with Blanche, stares at her without the least presence of mind.*)

Blanche.

(*contemptuously*) Well? So you have come back here. You have had the *meanness* to come into this house again. What a poor-spirited creature you must be! Why dont you go? (*He starts huffily for the door: she deliberately gets in his way, so that he has to stop*) *I* dont want you to stay. (*Taking a sudden resolution, he walks straight back to his chair,* RC, *and plants himself doggedly in it, arms folded. She comes down to* L.C. *after him*) But I forgot: you have found that there is some money to be made here. Lickcheese told you. *You*, who were so disinterested, so independent, that you could not accept anything from my father! (*At the end of every sentence she waits to see what execution she has done*) I suppose you will try to persuade me that you have come down here on a great philanthropic enterprise —to befriend the poor by having those houses rebuilt, eh? (*Trench sits tight and makes no sign.*) Yes, when my father *makes* you do it. And when Lickcheese has discovered some way of making it profitable. Oh, I know papa; and I know you. And for the sake of that, you come back here—into the house where you were refused—ordered out. (*Trench's face darkens*) Do you remember that? You know it is true: you cannot deny it. (*She sits*

down, and softens her tone a little as she affects to pity him) Ah, let me tell you that you cut a poor figure, a very, *very* poor figure, Harry. (*At the word "Harry" he relaxes the fold of his arms; his eye lights up; and a faint grin of anticipated victory appears on his face*) And you, too, a gentleman!—so highly connected!—with such distinguished relations!—so particular as to where your money comes from! I wonder at you. I really wonder at you. I should have thought that if your family brought you nothing else, it might at least have brought you some sense of personal dignity. Perhaps you think you look dignified at present, eh? (*No reply*) Well, I can assure you that you dont: you look most ridiculous—as foolish as a man could look—you dont know what to do; and you dont know what to say. But after all, I really do not see what anyone *could* say in defence of such conduct—such manly, chivalrous conduct. (*He looks vaguely straight in front of him, and purses his lips as if whistling. She becomes exquisitely polite*) I am afraid I am in your way, Dr. Trench. (*Rising*) I shall not intrude on you any longer. You seem so perfectly at home that I need make no apology for leaving you to yourself. (*She sweeps to the* L *door; opens it; and looks round to see if he has budged: then, seeing that he has not, she shuts the door and comes down* R *behind him, stopping a little way off*) Harry. (*He does not turn. She comes a step nearer*) Harry: I want you to answer me a question. (*Earnestly, stooping over him*) Look me in the face. (*No reply*) Do you hear? (*Putting her hand on his shoulder*) Look—me—in—the—face. (*He still stares straight in front*

of him. She suddenly kneels down beside him with her breast against his right shoulder; takes his face in her hands: and turns it towards her) Harry: (*now most tenderly*) why did you kiss my photograph just now, when you thought you were alone? (*His face writhes, as he tries hard not to smile; but he is evidently vanquished; and his arm slips round her. She adds, playfully*) How dare you touch anything belonging to me?

Trench.

I hear some one coming. (*She regains her chair with a bound, and pushes it back as far* L *as possible. Voices outside. Re-enter at* R *door Cokane, Lickcheese and Sartorius. Sartorius and Lickcheese come down* R *to Trench. Cokane crosses to Blanche* L *in his most killing manner.*)

SCENE XII.

SARTORIUS, TRENCH, LICKCHEESE, COKANE, BLANCHE.

Cokane.

How do you do, Miss Sartorius, how do you do? Nice weather for the return of *l'enfant prodigue*, eh?

Blanche.

Capital, Mr. Cokane. So glad to see you. (*Gives her hand, which he kisses with gallantry.*)

Lickcheese.

(*on Trench's left, in a low voice*) Any noos for us, Mr. Trench?

Trench.

(*to Sartorius, on his right*) I'll stand in, compensation or no compensation. (*Shakes Sartorius's hand. Annie has just appeared at the door.*)

Blanche.

(*calling from near* L *door to* R) Supper is ready, papa.

Cokane.

Allow me.

(*Exeunt omnes: Blanche on Cokane's arm; Lickcheese jocosely taking Sartorius on one arm, and Trench on the other.*)

CURTAIN.

Appendix I.

The Author to the Dramatic Critics.

FELLOW-CRITICS

It is one of my advantages that I can discuss criticism, not merely as an author, but as a critic. I have no illusions about critics being authors who have failed. I know, as one who has practised both crafts, that authorship is child's play compared to criticism; and I have, you may depend upon it, my full share of the professional instinct which regards the romancer as a mere adventurer in literature, and the critic as a highly skilled workman. Ask any novelist or dramatist whether he can write a better novel or play than I; and he will blithely say Yes. Ask him to take my place as critic for one week; and he will blench from the test. The truth is that the critic stands between popular authorship, for which he is not silly enough, and great authorship, for which he has not genius enough. It is certainly true that the status of popular author is much coveted by critics; but that is because the popular author is much better paid for much easier work. Thackeray, like many other eminent authors, coveted a government sinecure; but nobody therefore supposes that authors are merely unsuccessful sinecurists,

or that a well paid post in the civil service would have been intellectually a promotion for Thackeray. He who publishes a critical essay well knows how few care to read such things; whereas some donkey of an author, with the imagination of a schoolboy, or some sentimental young lady perhaps, will turn out a story too absurd to be thinkable by an ordinarily competent critic, and yet have it bought by scores and hundreds of thousands of readers of fiction. It is the natural desire to wallow in the profits of romantic make-believe instead of toiling for the scanty wages of "the intolerable fatigue of thought" that drives the critic to envy the author.

You will now feel, fellow-critics, that in turning dramatist I have not turned traitor. It is for the honor of our guild that I venture to suggest that even in the intellectual department the authors are getting ahead of us. I do not wish to rake up the case of Ibsen and his *Ghosts* again: I think it will be admitted now that the most old-fashioned school for young ladies in the country would have made almost as good a job of that discussion as we did. It was not a question of our liking Ibsen or not liking him, agreeing with him or not agreeing with him. Whichever way our bias lay it was our business to analyse his position skilfully and pronounce on it coolly. Under no circumstances should we have forgotten ourselves so far as to scold at him and cry Fie! like a bevy of illiterate prudes. This, however, is what too many of us did; and now, since what is done cannot be undone, we had better put up a few posts to warn future critics off the dangerous places where we come to grief oftenest.

The first warning I propose is: Do not let us raise the cry of "Ibsen" whenever we find a modern idea in a play. See what it has led to in the following passages culled from criticisms—some of them friendly and able ones—of *Widowers' Houses*.

"As an ardent admirer of Ibsen's methods, he has not scrupled to follow the method of that writer to extremes."—*Daily Telegraph.* "The lesson is trite in the case of creeds that the disciple not seldom distances the master. Ibsen has justly been charged, etc., etc."—*Athenæum.* "The London Ibsen [ironical]. One can see that all this is meant to be exceedingly Ibsenesque."—*Sunday Sun.* "I really think it is time the Independent Theatre Society made an effort to secure a play that is not moulded on the lines laid down by the great and only Ibsen."—*Pelican.* "Mr. Shaw is a zealous Ibsenite."—*Weekly Dispatch.* "A rather silly play by a rather clever man, which may be either worship or satire of Ibsenius the Great."—*Saturday Review.* "Mr. Shaw is the high priest, one may say, of Ibsenism."—*Piccadilly.* "Like all the Ibsenians he ruins his argument," etc.—*Modern Society.* "Mr. Shaw is an Ibsenite and is consequently quite up to date."—*Freeman's Journal.* "A promising young tigress of a daughter, who is drawn on the severest principles of Ibsenite heredity."—*Western Mercury.*

Now the first two acts of *Widowers' Houses* were written in 1885, when I knew nothing about Ibsen; and I must add that the authors of the lines quoted above should have guessed this, because there is not one idea in the play that cannot be more easily referred to half a dozen English writers than to Ibsen; whilst of his peculiar retrospective method, by which his plays are made to turn upon events supposed to have happened before the rise of the curtain, there is not a trace in my work. The subjects which seem most strongly to suggest Ibsen to modern critics are (1) Heredity, (2) the Emancipation of Woman, (3) any adverse criticism whatever

of our marriage laws and customs, and (4) any mixture of wickedness and goodness in the same character. It is therefore necessary to remind ourselves that modern English culture was saturated with the conception of heredity by Herbert Spencer, Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, and Galton before Ibsen's name was known here; that the Married Women's Property Act, the result of a long and strenuous crusade against what I may call the anti-Ibsenite ideal of marriage, was passed in England before *A Doll's House* was written; that the two most famous works on the subject of Women's Rights are Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women*, dated respectively 1792, and 1869; and that those who may never have studied the complex characters in the fiction of Balzac, George Eliot, George Meredith, and other well-known modern writers, may at least be presumed to have read the history of King David in the Bible, and to have learnt from it that Nature does not keep heroism exclusively for one set of men and villainy exclusively for another, merely to enable us all to become dramatists and "paint character" with a bucket of whitewash and a jar of lampblack. These things are the more important for a critic to observe, because matters have taken such a course in England for the last fifty years that the man who has neither the culture of the Bible nor that of the Evolutionist school is in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a man with no culture at all—a suspicion not to be lightly incurred by anyone whose calling it is to bring culture to bear on dramatic literature. Be warned therefore; for it is hard to see how a critic who has

dipped into modern English literature even to the modest extent of reading one of Mr. Grant Allen's novels, could write as if every idea in physics and morals that is not to be found in Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation* and Dr. Watts' poems must necessarily be a recent Norwegian importation.

The second warning is: Let us not try to encourage the hypocrisy of the theatre, already greater than that of the conventicle, by being more austere in our judgment of *dramatis personæ* than of real men and women. Imitate that excellent critic of mine (known to me only through his very agreeable notice of my play) the London correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald*, who says:—

"The characters are depicted naturally, and not in the glorified form so common upon the conventional stage. . . . It was a treat for once to see a hero (like one of Thackeray's) no better than one of his fellow-men; to listen to the worldliness of the slum landlord and his clerk; and particularly to welcome a heroine who shows her temper to her betrothed, and still more to her father, and who, like other estimable womankind whom we frequently meet in real life, though rarely on the stage, is always ready to quarrel on a point of feminine dignity, but when 'cornered' is always anxious to forgive and to make friends again."

That is what I call a reasonable criticism. Now listen to some of the others:—

"There can hardly be said to be a single estimable personage in the whole play."—*Times.* "All his *dramatis personæ* are entirely selfish and despicable."—*Daily Telegraph.* "Revolting picture of middle-class life. . . . Remorselessly the eccentric one [the author] laid bare his idealized essence of snobbishness compressed from all the worst specimens of his fellow-men, and bade us believe that he was painting from life. . . . The abominable Blanche appears in a worse light than ever; and the eccentricity ends with the smothering of what small spark

of decency remained in the heart of the only person of the whole bunch who ever had any."—*Morning Leader.* "It is already impossible, we should hope, to find a set of people so peculiar and unsympathetic as those introduced in this play."—*Morning Advertiser.* "In such a world what is to be done but to show hands all round and caper to the tune of 'rogues all'?"—*Globe.* "Mr. Gilbert possesses an uncanny habit of turning up the seamy side of life's robe; but Mr. Shaw's world has not rags enough to cover its nudity. He aims to show with Zolaesque exactitude that middle-class life is foul and leprous. The play means that the middle class, even to its womanhood, is brutal at heart, or it means nothing."—*Athenæum.* "A set of blood-suckers. Every one is ill-conditioned, quarrelsome, fractious, apt to behave, at a moment's notice, like a badly-brought-up child."—*World.* "The mere word 'mortgage' suffices to turn hero into rascal. Mr. Shaw will say that is his point—scratch a middle-class hero and you find a rascal."—*Speaker.* "Revelation of a distorted and myopic outlook on society."—*Sunday Sun.* "Very disagreeable heroine . . . all the other characters in the play—the poor parlormaid alone excepted—are as hateful as that heroine."—*Era.* "Mr. Shaw devotes all his energies to making his characters unsympathetic, sordid, soulless—ending even worse than they began."—*Stage.* "Heartless young lady . . . cads of diverse temperaments."—*Weekly Dispatch.* "He goes further than Ibsen, whose characters are a mixture of knaves and fools; whereas in *Widowers' Houses* they are all knaves."—*Modern Society.* "Mr. Shaw starts with a total disbelief in human nature."—*Freeman's Journal.* "All the characters were villains except a pretty parlormaid."—*Western Mercury.* "The moral seems to be the utter selfishness of human nature outside a progressive County Council."—*Umpire.* "I could not help noticing that the only thoroughly decent character in the play was a sort of Mrs. Harris in the shape of the parson, who was only allowed to be talked about, but who did not appear."—*Mr. Ben. Greet, addressing the Church and Stage Guild.*

I remember once hearing Mr. Moody the Evangelist preach on the text, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." He declared strenuously that in morals a miss is as good as a

mile, and that the most venial sin damns as effectually as the most atrocious crime. To have fallen short of the glory of God is enough, whether by an inch or a league does not matter. I must say that from any other point of view than Mr. Moody's, the passages set forth above appear to me to be ludicrous exaggerations. Even after making all allowance for the effect on the writers of the way in which, for the first time on the stage (as far as I know) they saw the citizen with his share in the guilt of our industrial system brought home to him, I still think that they might have paused to ask themselves in what respect Trench, Sartorius, Blanche, Cokane and Lickcheese are any worse, I will not say than themselves, but than the characters in any of the comedies, ancient or modern, to which they have taken no exception on this score. I certainly had no intention of spoiling the moral of my play by making the characters at all singular; and I suggest that the following considerations will explain my apparent cynicism.

Formerly, a man was responsible only for his private conduct and for the maintenance of his own household. To-day, as an inevitable consequence of Democracy, he is responsible for the state of the whole community which he helps to govern as a citizen and a voter. Now a man may discharge his private responsibility very well, and yet not even realize that his public responsibility exists. Just as Charles I. was an excellent private gentleman and an intolerable king, so most men to-day are reasonably good friends and fathers, but execrable citizens. Sartorius is the ordinary man of business, voting

for the candidate who promises to keep down the rates, and getting on the vestry solely to prevent the vestry from interfering with his property. And he does so in a hypocritical way only because that is the custom—not in the least because he is a Pecksniff. I have drawn him as a man of strong and masterful character, unscrupulous but not a law-breaker, a kind and unselfish father, and much more reasonable and even magnanimous with Trench than the typical villa owner, who is a comparatively spiteful and huffy person. He is, in short, distinctly an exceptional and superior specimen of the middle-class man whose business it is to deal *directly* with the poor. His rascality—for from the social point of view he certainly is a callous rascal—does not lie in his refusing to spend money on his rookeries, since his plea that his tenants would burn his improvements is perfectly well founded. It lies altogether in his indifference to defects in our social system which produce a class of persons so poor that they are driven by constant physical privation to turn everything they can lay hands on into more fuel and more food. When we find a castaway at sea chewing his boots to appease his hunger, we do not stigmatize him as a creature too degraded to appreciate the right use of boots: we take him aboard and relieve his hunger, after which he wears his boots as appreciatively as a West End gentleman. But Sartorius is not ashamed to explain the disappearance of his banisters and cistern lids on the absurd ground that "these people do not know how to live in handsome houses." He has found out that there is no use in treating them goodnaturedly ;

and he has not enough social conscience to proceed to ask why there is no use, and to find out how, as a citizen and an elector, to remedy the abject poverty which makes a woman willing, for the sake of having a good warm, to burn the handrail that is put up to save her and her neighbors from falling downstairs. The point may not be obvious at once to a critic who has only to ring the bell for another scuttle of Wallsend when his fire runs low, any more than it was obvious to Sartorius. Consequently, in every denunciation of Sartorius as a monster, we may see the hand of Sartorius himself.*

I now come to a string of remonstrances partly brought on me by a passage in an interview published in the *Star* newspaper (November 29th, 1892), in which I declared that I wished to appeal to the audience "on the solid ground of political economy," and to have a blackboard on the stage with diagrams to illustrate my points, with much more chaff of the same kind. Here is the result :—

"A kind of leading article of the slashing type."—*Morning.* "An exposition in dialogue of the New Economics. . . . What has this farrago of newspaper leaders and Fabian essays to do with the play?"—*Star.* "Undramatic attempt to cut up a Parliamentary Report into uneven stage lengths. . . . Published as one of the dialogues sometimes given in the *Fortnightly Review* it would be effective."—*Echo.* "A discussion, with open doors, of the pros and cons of slum landlordism . . . a good sermon."—*Black and White.* "A new form of didactic Socialistic demonstration, like the practicable laundries with the poor washerwomen at work which

* On this subject of current middle-class morality, see also the letters I have addressed to the Press in answer to my critics, extracts from which will be found in the second appendix.

figured in a recent procession in Hyde Park."—*Sunday Sun.* "It would be readable and might be useful as a Fabian pamphlet."—*Weekly Dispatch.* "In no sense a drama, but a succession of dialogues in which the author sets forth his views concerning Socialist questions."—*Lloyds.* "Not a play—a pamphlet."—*Encore.* "The exposure of certain social sins connected with the letting of tenement houses afforded the sole *raison d'être* of Mr. Shaw's feeble little play."—*Observer.* "His propaganda—I beg pardon, his new play."—*Penny Illustrated Paper.* "Merely a lecture."—*Financial Observer.* "Mr. Shaw wishes to utter a tirade against certain abuses; and he thinks the theatre a suitable pulpit for his utterances."—*Colonies and India.* "The play is a pamphlet in dramatic form."—*Western Mercury.* "The whole of the three acts is occupied with a dreary discussion of the ethics of slum property."—*Birmingham Post.* "Three acts of dreary dissertation on the familiar text that 'rent is robbery.'"—*Yorkshire Post.* Mr. Bernard Shaw is an amiable Fabian who believes that 'rent is robbery.'"—*Yorkshire Evening Post.*

Now I think it must be evident at this rate to all who have read the play, that if I had written *The Merchant of Venice* it would have been denounced as a dissertation on the Jewish question, complicated by a crude exposition of the peculiar views of the Fabian Society on the law of contract. All I need say on the Fabian point is that any person who would like to see the difference between an essay on rent and *Widowers' Houses* can buy *Fabian Essays*, containing just such an essay by me, for ninepence. Fabian pamphlets, in which I have had a hand, can be obtained for a penny; and a comparison of them with this play will shew how little the critics quoted above know how merciful I have been to them. Let me say, however, that it is impossible for any fictionist, dramatic or other, to make true pictures of modern society without some know-

ledge of the economic anatomy of it. And since what the dramatist ought to know the critic ought to know, a course of Fabian literature would most unquestionably do incalculable good to both dramatists and critics, if they could be persuaded to go through it. For all that, I see that it would be useless to blame a critic to-day for not being an economist, or even an ordinarily competent politician and man of business. Nobody expects it from him; and he himself benightedly ridicules the idea. But what I do expect him to know is that "bluebook plays" hold the stage far better than conventionally idealist dramas. I need only mention the irrepressible *Never too Late to Mend* to prove that *Widowers' Houses*, far from being a play of so new a sort that its very title to the name of drama is questionable, is, on its bluebook side, a sample (whether good or bad is not here in question) of one of the most familiar, popular, and firmly established *genres* in English dramatic literature. It is a matter of experience that the dramatized or novelized bluebook or Fabian Essay (so to speak) has ten times as much chance of success as the mere romance, though it is also, of course, a much more difficult job for the writer. My warning therefore is against the folly of assuming that the reverse is the case, and that a play is handicapped by a basis of bluebook. A wary critic, if he wished to "slate" *Widowers' Houses*, would begin somewhat in this fashion: "Not even with all the advantages of his profound economic knowledge and his complete acquaintance with the wealth of dramatic material stored in our national bluebook literature was Mr. Shaw able to produce a tolerable

play." It is mere perversity to assume that the less a dramatist knows and cares about real life, the better his plays are likely to be.

There are a dozen other warnings that I could formulate for the sake of our younger and weaker brethren, who are being severely tested by the dramatic revival now beginning. But as I very much doubt whether they have read thus far into what must be to them a piece of heavy literature, I will indulge myself by laying down a just now rather weary pen, confident that the really able brothers of the craft will forgive my preaching, seeing that they best know how much the rest stand in need of a sermon. My sole object is to knock on the head a few empty formulas which take up the space in dramatic criticism which should be occupied by real live ideas, and which have been trotted out in the last few years whenever a play has been produced with any pretension to represent modern life as it is really lived.

Appendix II.

The following extracts from letters addressed by the author to the press after the performance of *Widowers' Houses* are reprinted here to give the reading public some idea of the commotion which can be made in a theatre by a work which, if published as a novel, would surprise no one. First, as to the extent of the commotion, hear *The Era* of the 24th December, 1892:—

"Hardly any recent play has provoked so much newspaper and other controversy as Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*. At least two of the daily papers, on the day after its production, devoted leading articles to its consideration, besides special criticisms of almost unprecedented length. We should be afraid to say how many journals gave two long columns to it. Then all last week a controversy on its merits and demerits raged in a morning paper; and it was held up as an example of the kind of play the Lord Chamberlain did *not* object to by Mrs. Aveling in her lecture to the Playgoers; and, finally, it was one of the subjects of an interesting lecture delivered last Sunday night to the Socialists of Hammersmith. The last fact, however, becomes less surprising when we find that the lecturer was Mr. Bernard Shaw."

This account is not exaggerated. The play occupied the press for weeks after its production to an extent which, in a really healthy and active phase of dramatic art, would have been absurd. The discussion raged chiefly round matters of fact, most

of the writers seeming to have no definite idea of the sources of the revenues enjoyed by the propertied classes under our industrial system. In replying to these criticisms the author carefully abstained from confusing issues of fact with the artistic issues alluded to in the preface to the present volume; and it should be noted that whereas in that preface the play is defended as a work of art, here it is justified mainly as a document. To the editor of *The Star* the author is indebted for the publication, on the 19th December, 1892, of a letter of which the following is an abridgment:—

"SIR,—The critics of my play *Widowers' Houses* have now had their say. Will you be so good as to let the author have a turn? I have gone through every criticism I could get hold of; and I think it is now clear that 'the new drama' has no malice to fear from the serious critics. The care with which every possible admission in my favor has been made, even in the notices of those who found the play intolerably disagreeable and the author intolerably undramatic, shews that the loss of critical balance produced by the first shock of Ibsen's *Ghosts* was only momentary, and that the most unconventional and obnoxious agitator-dramatist, even when he has gone out of his way to attack his critics, need not fear a Press vendetta.

"However, the fairness of criticism is one thing, its adequacy quite another. I do not hesitate to say that many of my critics have been completely beaten by the play simply because they are ignorant of society. Do not let me be misunderstood: I do not mean that they eat with their knives, drink the contents of their finger-bowls, or sit down to dinner in ulsters and green neckties. What I mean is that they do not know life well enough to recognize it in the glare of the footlights. They denounce Sartorius, my house-knacking widower, as a monstrous libel on the middle and upper class, because he grinds his money remorselessly out of the poor. But they do not (and cannot) answer his argument as to the impossibility of his acting otherwise under our social system;

nor do they notice the fact that though he is a bad landlord he is not in the least a bad man as men go. Even in his economic capacity I have made him a rather favorable specimen of his class. I might have made him a shareholder in a match factory where avoidable 'phossy jaw' is not avoided, or in a tram company working its men seventeen and a half hours a day, or in a railway company with a terrible death-roll of mangled shunters, or in a whitelead factory or chemical works—in short, I might have piled on the agony beyond the endurance of my audience, and yet not made him one whit worse than thousands of personally amiable and respected men who have invested in the most lucrative way the savings they have earned or inherited. I will not ask those critics who are so indignant with my 'distorted and myopic outlook on society' what they will do with the little money their profession may enable them to save. I will simply tell them what they *must* do with it, and that is follow the advice of their stockbroker as to the safest and most remunerative investment, reserving their moral scruples for the expenditure of the interest, and their sympathies for the treatment of the members of their own families. Even in spending the interest they will have no alternative but to get the best value they can for their money without regard to the conditions under which the articles they buy are produced. They will take a domestic pride in their comfortable homes, full of furniture made by 'slaughtered' (*i.e.* extra-sweated) cabinet makers, and go to church on Sunday in shirts sewn by women who can only bring their wages up to subsistence point by prostitution. What will they say to Sartorius then? What, indeed, can they say to him now?—these 'guilty creatures sitting at a play,' who, instead of being struck to the soul and presently proclaiming their malefactions, are naïvely astonished and revolted at the spectacle of a man on the stage acting as we are all acting perforce every day. The notion that the people in *Widowers' Houses* are abnormally vicious or odious could only prevail in a community in which Sartorius is absolutely typical in his unconscious villainy. Like my critics, he lacks conviction of sin. Now, the didactic object of my play is to bring conviction of sin—to make the Pharisee who repudiates Sartorius as either a Harpagon or a diseased dream of mine, and thanks God that such persons do not represent his class,

recognize that Sartorius is his own photograph. In vain will the virtuous critic tell me that he does not own slum property: all I want to see is the label on his matchbox, or his last week's washing-bill, to judge for myself whether he really ever gives a second thought to Sartorius's tenants, who make his matchboxes and wash his stockings so cheaply.

"As to the highly connected young gentleman, naturally straightforward and easygoing, who bursts into genuine indignation at the sufferings of the poor, and, on being shewn that he cannot help them, becomes honestly cynical and throws off all responsibility whatever, that is nothing but the reality of the everyday process known as disillusion. His allowing the two business men to get his legs under their mahogany, and to persuade him to 'stand in' with a speculation of which he understands nothing except that he is promised some money out of it, will surprise no one who knows the City, and has seen the exploitation of aristocratic names by City promoters spread from needy guinea-pig colonels, and lords with courtesy titles, to eldest sons of the noblest families. If I had even represented Harry Trench as letting himself in for eighteen months' hard labour for no greater crime than that of being gambler enough to be the too willing dupe of a swindler, the incident would be perfectly true to life. As to the compensation speculation in the third act being a fraud which no gentleman would have countenanced, that opinion is too innocent to be discussed. I can only say that as the object of the scheme is to make a haul at the expense of the ratepayers collectively, it is much less cruel and treacherous in its incidence than the sort of speculation which made the late Mr. Jay Gould universally respected during his lifetime. I shall be told next that Panama is a dream of mine.

"There is a curious idea in the minds of some of my critics that I have given away my case by representing the poor man, Lickcheese, as behaving, when he gets the chance, exactly as the rich man does. These gentlemen believe that, according to me, what is wrong with society is that the rich, who are all wicked, oppress the poor, who are all virtuous. I will not waste the space of *The Star* by dealing with such a misconception further than to curtly but good-humouredly

inform those who entertain it that they are fools. I administer the remark, not as an insult, but as a tonic.

"Now comes the question, How far does all this touch the merits of the play as a work of art? Obviously not at all; but it has most decidedly touched the value of the opinions of my critics on that point. The evidence of the notices (I have sheaves of them before me) is irresistible. With hardly an exception the men who find my sociology wrong are also the men who find my dramatic workmanship bad; and *vice versa.* Even the criticism of the acting is biassed in the same way. The effect on me, of course, is to reassure me completely as to my own competence as a playwright. The very success with which I have brought all the Philistines and sentimental idealists down on me proves the velocity and penetration with which my realism got across the footlights. I am well accustomed to judge of the execution I have done by the cries of the wounded.

"On one point, however, I heartily thank my critics for their unanimous forbearance. Not one of them has betrayed the licenses I have taken in the political and commercial details of the play. Considering that I have made a resident in Surbiton eligible as a St. Giles' vestryman; that I have made the London County Council contemporary with the 1885 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes; that I have represented an experienced man of business as paying 7 per cent. on a first mortgage—considering, in short, that I have recklessly sacrificed realism to dramatic effect in the machinery of the play, I feel, as may be well imagined, deeply moved by the compliments which have been paid me on my perfect knowledge of economics and business."

Before giving the rest of the letter, it is convenient to refer here to a very funny discussion which arose over the scene in the second act in which Blanche assaults the servant. Although nothing is commoner on the stage than bodily violence threatened or executed by indignant heroes, heroines have hitherto been excluded by convention from this method of displaying their prowess. The

author resolved to redress this injustice to Woman by making his heroine attack her servant much as Othello attacks his ancient. The resultant sensation testified to the hardihood of the experiment. The critics were highly scandalized; and their view of the incident was expressed in the following passage from a notice which appeared the day after the performance :—

"What a ludicrous incident! How we all shrieked with laughter! What has such a scene to do with the play? Why did Mr. Shaw introduce it? I will tell you why. Because Mr. Shaw wishes to present Blanche as a *type*, a type of the modern middle-class Englishwoman (as he sees her), the woman who will not hear about the poor wretches in their tenement houses because it is so unpleasant, and who, in her own drawing-room, can, in a fit of temper, use brutal violence to her own dependants."

It was not possible for the author to seriously discuss the notion that he regarded temper and violence as class characteristics. He was only able to say, in a letter to *The Speaker*, "Some people think that ladies with tempers are never personally violent. I happen to know that they are; and so I leave the matter." It is true that the ideal lady—the "typical" lady if that term be preferred—never strikes, never swears, never smokes, never gambles, never drinks, never nags, never makes advances to inept wooers, never, in short, does anything "unladylike," whether "in her own drawing-room" or elsewhere. Just so the ideal clergyman never hunts, never goes to the theatre, and regards the poorest laborer as his equal and his brother by their common Father, God. The author confesses to having

jilted *the* ideal lady for *a* real one. He did it intentionally; and he will probably do it again, and yet again, even at the risk of having the real ones mistaken for counter-ideals. Why Blanche should be held to indicate any belief on his part that all ladies are hot-tempered, any more than Hamlet is held to indicate a belief on Shakespear's part that all princes are philosophers, is not apparent to him.

Here is a final extract from the letter to *The Star* on the subject of Blanche:—

"On another point in her conduct one critic makes an objection which, I confess, amazed me. Sartorius, as the son of a very poor woman, knows that the poor are human beings exactly like himself. But his daughter, brought up as a lady, conceives them as a different and inferior species. 'I hate the poor,' she says—'at least, I hate those dirty, drunken, disreputable people who live like pigs.' The critic in question, whose bias towards myself is altogether friendly, cannot conceive that a young lady would avow such inhuman sentiments: hypocrisy, he contends, would prevent her if her heart did not. I can only refer him, if he has really never heard such sentiments boasted of by ladies, to the comments of the *Times* and the *St. James's Gazette* (to name no other papers written by gentlemen for gentlemen) on the unemployed, on the starving Irish peasants whose rents have since been reduced wholesale in the Irish land courts, or on the most heavily sweated classes of workers whose miserable plight has been exposed before Parliamentary Committees and Royal Commissions, to prove that the thinkers and writers of Blanche Sartorius's party vie with each other in unconscious—nay, conscientious—brutality, callousness, and class prejudice when they speak of the proletariat. Hypocrisy with them takes the shape of dissembling sympathy with the working class when they really feel it, not of affecting it when they do not feel it. My friend and critic must remember the savage caricatures of William Morris, John Burns, Miss Helen Taylor, Mrs. Besant, etc., in which *Punch* once indulged, as well as the outrageous calumnies which were heaped on the late Charles Bradlaugh

during his struggle to enter Parliament, not to mention the cases of unsocial conduct by county gentlemen and magistrates exposed every week in the 'Pillory' columns of *Truth*. Am I to be told that the young ladies who read these papers in our suburban villas are less narrow and better able to see across the frontiers of their own class than the writers whom their fathers support? The fact is that Blanche's class prejudices, like those of the other characters in the play, are watered down instead of exaggerated. The whole truth is too monstrous to be told otherwise than by degrees."

To this a writer in *The Lady's Pictorial* (24th December, 1892) retorts:—

"So it comes to this, that Mr. Shaw's defence for drawing a middle-class English girl as a virago who batters her maid and vilifies the starving poor, is that in professedly political papers (written by men for men—women not entering into the question at all), the other side is held up to ridicule by mud being flung upon their humble allies! as though the political game played by political journals has anything whatever to do with the attributes of humanity common to the average woman and the average man!"

It only remains for the author to meet this defence by citing the journalism written by women for women, and by denying most strenuously that the indifference of women to political journalism can be interpreted in any other way than as a selfish and narrow insensibility to the social questions which form the real substance of politics.

The only other utterance of the author's which need be quoted is from a letter to *The Speaker* (31st December, 1892). It is not a defence of the artistic value of the play, which cannot be established or disestablished by argument, but a renewal of the author's insistence on the impossibility of appreciating

a work of art without adequate knowledge of its subject-matter :—

"I now approach the question which is really the most interesting from the critical point of view. Is it possible to treat the artistic quality of a play altogether independently of its scientific quality? For example, is it possible for a critic to be perfectly appreciative and perfectly incredulous and half insensible at the same time? I do not believe it for a moment. No point in a drama can produce any effect at all unless the spectator perceives it and accepts it as a real point; and this primary condition being satisfied, the force of the effect will depend on the extent to which the point interests the spectator—that is, seems momentous to him. The spectacle of Hamlet fencing with an opponent whose foil is 'unbated' produces its effect because the audience knows the danger; but there are risks just as thrilling to those who understand them, risks of cutting arteries in surgical operations, risks of losing large sums by a momentary loss of nerve in the money market, risks of destroying one's whole character by an apparently trifling step, perils of all sorts which may give the most terrible intensity to a scene in the eyes of those who have the requisite technical knowledge or experience of life to fathom the full significance of what they are witnessing, but which would produce as little effect on others as the wheeling forward of a machine gun would on a hostile tribe of savages unacquainted with the 'resources of civilization.'

"It has long been clear to me that nothing will be done for the theatre until the most able dramatists refuse to write down to the level of that imaginary monster the British Public. We want a theatre for people who have lived, thought, and felt, and who have some real sense that women are human beings just like men, only worse brought up, and consequently worse behaved. In such a theatre the merely literary man who has read and written instead of living until he has come to feel fiction as experience and to resent experience as fiction, would be as much out of place as the ideal British Public itself. Well, let him sit out his first mistaken visit quietly and not come again; for it is clear that only by holding the mirror up to literature can the dramatist please him, whereas it is by holding it up to nature that good work is produced. In

such a theatre *Widowers' Houses* would rank as a trumpery farcical comedy; whereas to-day it is excitedly discussed as a daringly original sermon, political essay, satire, Drapier letter or what not, even by those who will not accept it as a play on any terms because its hero did not, when he learnt that his income came from slum property, at once relinquish it (*i.e.*, make it a present to Sartorius without benefiting the tenants) and go to the goldfields to dig out nuggets with his strong right arm, so that he might return to wed his Blanche after a shipwreck (witnessed by her in a vision), just in time to rescue her from beggary, brought upon her by the discovery that Lickcheese was the rightful heir to the property of Sartorius, who had dispossessed and enslaved him by a series of forgeries unmasked by the faithful Cokane. Was it really lack of capacity that led me to forego all this 'drama' by making my hero do exactly what he would have done in real life—that is, apologize like a gentleman (in the favorable sense) for accusing another man of his own unconscious rascality, and admit his inability to change a world that will not take the trouble to change itself?"

The reader will now be in a position to understand the sort of controversy which has so magnified the importance of *Widowers' Houses*.

Appendix III.

The following is an item of news from *The Star* newspaper of the 2nd January, 1893 :—

"A dangerous staircase has proved fatal to Elizabeth H——, aged 40, a charwoman, of X Buildings. The evidence at St. Giles's Coroner's Court on Saturday showed that the deceased was found lying at the bottom of the stairs at her lodgings on Tuesday morning, at half-past twelve, in an insensible condition. She was carried upstairs and put to bed, but died the same day.

"The Coroner's officer: 'The stairs are very dangerous at night. They are insufficiently lighted.'

"Dr. Brennan deposed that death was due to extensive fracture of the skull. He said he found the stairs dark and slippery. A handrail was needed.

"The Coroner: 'There is, I understand, no resident landlord on the premises.' Over a hundred families live at these buildings. The jury, in returning a verdict of 'Accidental death,' added the subjoined rider: 'The jurors, having heard in evidence that the staircases leading to X Buildings are insufficiently lighted, and that there are no handrails, would call the attention of the landlord to this condition of things, with a view to their immediate improvement.'"

The report of the Royal Commission of 1885 on the Housing of the Working Classes, alluded to in the third act of the play, may also be consulted as to the ordinary rent and condition of a single-room tenement in London.

Finally, it may not be amiss to observe that the author has himself made collections of weekly rents from very poor tenants, and is conversant with the attitude of the middle-class proprietor towards the laborer tenant.

THE END.

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